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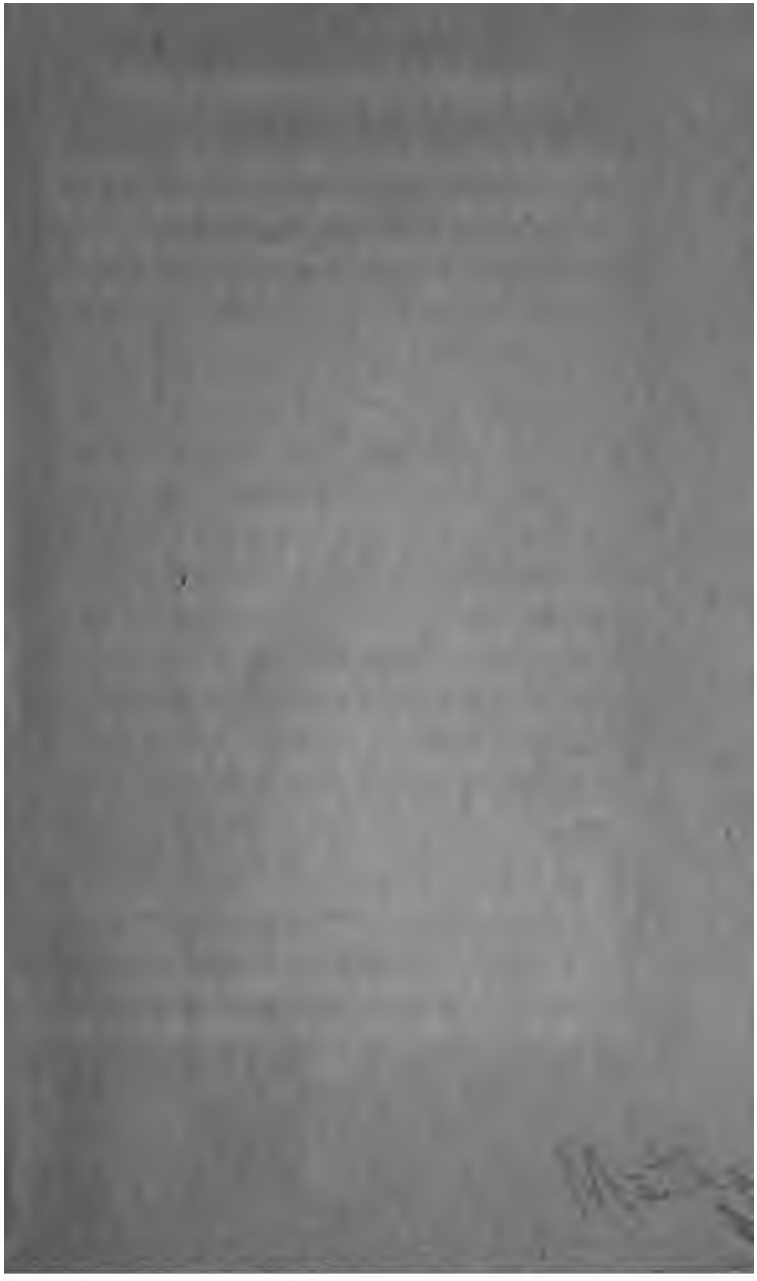

THE MARQUISES' MILLIONS

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NY

"DE MONPLAISIR IMPETUOUSLY LEAPED FROM THE COACH AND SEIZED THE HAND OF THE MARQUISE."

[*Page 192*

The Marquise's Millions

A Novel

By

Frances Aymar Mathews

Author of "Billy Duane," "My Lady Peggy Goes to Town," "A Little Tragedy at Tien-Tsin," etc., etc.

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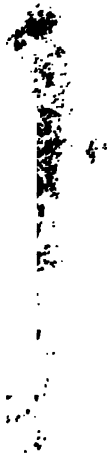
To
Cousin Lilly
at
Elcote



[I]

I

WHERE an arm of the great blue sea stretches up between the brown lands, where a foaming brook like an outstretched finger, fissuring down the rocky way from its birth in the Cévennes, meets and marries with the sea-arm, there lies Brimont-Taube, with the garden-beds of the grand château lapped by the lips of the laughing little river. Yonder, two leagues away, is Brimont-Aujillac, where the smoke from the five tall chimneys of the silk factory, belonging, as does all the rest hereabouts, to the Marquise de Brimont, clouds the sky, trailing westward in the wake of the wind. Hither where the sea sweeps up the sands and swallows

the small Taube river at one famous gulp, lies nestling under a pile of rocks Taube-sur-Mer, a fishing village, with groups of huts, beached boats, nets drying in the sun; clattering of wooden shoes, chattering of soft clicking tongues of Languedoc; high laughter, tuned to override the whistle and shriek of the storms, straight-backed, comely women balancing baskets of fish on their heads as they stride up the sand hills past the church with its glittering cross, past the tiny square with its granite column, a sturdy bronze Napoleon the First atop of it; past the rows of houses, up the rue de Taube, out to the King's Highway; climbing the hill that leads to the great gates of the park of the Château de Brimont.

It was the year 1896. The rest of the civilized world eager, panting, jubi-

lant with progress, reform, improvement, education; its brains teeming with Olympian inventions, with millennial elevations of the masses, vast and splendid projects for the raising of its Lazarus to the level of its Jove; while here in this corner of France not even a ripple or a suspicion of these commotions reached. In neither Brimont-Aujillac, Brimont-Taube, nor Taube-sur-Mer was there hint of electricity, steam, automobile, bicycle, photography, gas, waterworks, or any of the thousand and one things one calls the necessities. Once a week a diligence from Montpelier lumbered into Brimont-Aujillac occasionally bringing a letter for the agent of the marquise from a merchant, or a visiting priest came to spend a saint's day or Sunday preaching to the young people who worked in the mills.

No newspaper was published within a hundred miles of Brimont, no journal nor magazine ever reached Brimont, save it had been once, when the Abbé de la Toinette, the chaplain and confessor of the marquise and of mademoiselle, her sister, had brought back from his visit to Rome a copy of the *Corriere di Napoli,* the which, since it opened with a eulogy of the then reigning French emperor, was publicly burned by the marquise on the stone terrace, in the presence of the abbé, mademoiselle and the excellent Clémentine, the maid, who had presided for lo, these fifty years over those mysteries which were condensed under the term of *la toilette.*

For the marquise, difficult as it is to understand in the said year of grace, 1896, was a Royalist to the tips of her

taper fingers and of her pointed and high-heeled little slippers.

She hated him whom she called "the upstart Corsican," and all his brood, with an undying hatred, with that hatred of the one regarded as a usurper, which is only possible to a soul imbued with that mysterious passion known as loyalty to a lost and royal cause.

When, in 1848, the twenty-four-years-old bride of the Marquis de Brimont saw her splendid young husband sail across the straits, one of the few to cling to the fallen fortunes of Louis Philippe, sending her and her sister to the estate in Languedoc, her grandmama, the old Comtesse de la Coutrée, had said, bidding her godspeed from her deathbed in Paris.

"Go, my beloved grandchild, go to your own and your husband's people.

Cherish and protect them; teach them to loath the Corsican, teach them to venerate and love the kingly house of Bourbon in all its branches. Teach them that altho today the demagogues prevail; altho tomorrow Corsica slips from his snake-hole and twists himself around the hearts of the French people, there is the day after tomorrow, my child, when, if you wait patiently, watch untiringly, prepare always, our king, Louis, the nineteenth of his name, will come into his own. Look ever toward the sea, and you shall behold the white flag flying, the lilies emblazoned on the silk, and let Brimont and the daughter of the house of de la Coutrée be ready faithful, even though you and Marie Sylvie live to be my age before he comes—still the nineteenth Louis will come and come by way of the

high sea to Brimont and so to Paris and his coronation."

And for forty-eight years the marquise and Mademoiselle Marie Sylvie Amélie Adelaïde de la Coutrée had obeyed implicitly the commands of their grandparent.

The young Marquis de Brimont had early succumbed to the rigors of an English climate, and had passed out of this world with the names of his king and his fair young wife on his lips, devising to her solely the magnificent estates in Languedoc, and enjoining upon her to use all her immense fortune, if need be, in the cause of the royal house they both so ardently loved; never to relinquish the hope of the restoration; to look forward always to the hour when a nineteenth Louis should sit upon the throne.

These solemn injunctions the marquise had now, for nearly half a century, piously fulfilled, in so far as was possible to one who remained immured at the Château de Brimont, and had not in all that time been even as far as Montpelier; to one who was shut off, and away from, the whole trend and scope of modern impulse and thought, and who was precisely a bit of the eighteenth century in a setting as completely eighteenth century as herself.

When the young and beautiful little marquise had bade adieu to her husband and her king, had journeyed to Brimont-Taube from Paris, and jumped from the post-chaise, she instantly ran up the terrace, taking mademoiselle, then but sixteen, by the hand, and hurried up the narrow stone staircase which led to the chapel of the châ-

teau. Once before the altar of the Blessed Virgin, she had prostrated herself, and, calling upon the patron saints to witness, had vowed never to leave Brimont until King Louis the nineteenth should come to pay the visit which her grandparent had foretold; and mademoiselle had duplicated this pious and loyal vow on the spot.

Nor had it been broken in either case for all these forty and eight years.

Every morning a mass was sung in the little chapel "for the king"; every evening the rich pink brocade gowns, the point-lace capes and frills, the pink rose coronets, the diamond parures, the pink shoes, the mitts and fans and bracelets were all laid out in the dressing-rooms by Clémentine, lest his majesty should arrive that day, perchance, for dinner.

Every night the candles were set in the windows that looked toward the sea, far up in the very top of the tower of the château, lest his majesty's ship, peradventure, might that very night come sailing into the little Bay of Taube. And in the late autumn and winter, when the storms broke over the coast and when the great winds from the snow-clad mountains whipped and spurred and churned the sea into whirlpools of dismay and black depths of sucking, prey-seeking horror, when the thunder split the waters into mountains of death, when the lightning laughed and jeered among the awful clouds, when the shore piled high with wreckage and the fishermen's wives shuddered for the boats that were not yet come home, then the marquise climbed the tower stairs and knelt with her rosary in her fingers

and prayed that the king's ship might not be coming this time. Then mademoiselle crawled down to the chapel, and with Clémentine and the good abbé repeated *aves* and *pater nosters* innumerable for the safety of his majesty the king, should he be on the great deep. Then the fishermen's wives and children asked God to preserve their husbands and fathers and their king as well, and all the honorable and noble ladies in the neighboring châteaux, and all the good nuns of the convent at Brimont-Aujillac also fell piously and regularly upon their knees and invoked heaven's protection upon the king, who might possibly be, even now, voyaging toward his country.

For the three places, all one in a sense, since they were comprised in the estates of the marquise and her sister—

Brimont-Aujillac, Brimont-Taube, and little, scrawny Taube-sur-Mer—were royalist to a man and looked forward, as much as they did to anything—for the French peasant adventures very slightly into the future—to the return of the sovereign for whom they had been instructed, for nearly fifty years now, to watch, always by way of the sea.

That this state of affairs was possible in imperial and republican France may seem an anomaly, if not a piece of fiction. It is not fiction. It is truth, nor is it anomalous to one who knows the byways, the forgotten places, the untrodden, untouristed villages of France, the splendid castles, the extended dependencies, the almost feudal maintenances at this day flourishing there, untouched by either imperial decree or republican fiat. The perfect

reality of corporate bodies of people living in absolute security from the whirr of the outside world and entirely ignored by the government which prevails over the rest of the land.

Such corners there are, where someone, some power, some sentiment, some spirit of loyalty, chivalry, has, at a critical moment in a country's history, laid a strong, arrestive finger on the pulse of '48, say, and said to it, " Thus far and no farther."

And the years come and go and the empire crumbles and the free state arises, and men scheme and women plot and children learn to salute the new flags; and old men take to new wines and ways; but here at Brimont people fly the white flag with the Bourbon lilies embroidered on it when the day of St. Louis comes around, and no one

says them nay or pays any attention to them whatever.

It is true that when the young marquise beheld, on the morning after her arrival at the château, the Napoleon column and the Napoleon statue staring straight in at her from the window on the grand staircase-landing, she felt an immediate impulse to order it felled to the earth and thrown into the sea. But, upon consultation with the abbé, she contented herself with having the window walled up and a medallion of Louis the Sixteenth placed in the outer niche in such a position as to give back the Corsican look for look.

No violet was allowed to grow in the gardens of the Château de Brimont; bees were chased by the marquise and mademoiselle as if they had been adders.

"Horrible emblems of the Corsican trickster!" cried the marquise, even this very morning, as she sat upon the terrace sipping her chocolate, when an adventurous honey-seeker came to breakfast with her in the sugar-bowl.

"Away with it, Clémentine!" cried her mistress; and Clémentine, altho turned seventy, flew nimbly after the offensive and imperial insect.

"Ah, good morning, Monsieur l'Abbé," added the marquise, as the holy man came hobbling up the steps.

"Good morning, mesdames," bowing low to both the ladies, whom indeed he had seen already in the chapel at the early daily mass.

"I am then pleased to congratulate you both," with another bow, "on your laying aside of mourning for his late

majesty of blessed memory, King Philippe the Seventh."

Whereupon all three of these grand old people devoutly crossed themselves, exactly as they had done forty-six years before for Louis Philippe, and later for Henry the Fifth, when the periods of wearing black for these illustrious sovereigns had elapsed.

The marquise now smoothed out the pink ribbons which ornamented her bodice, and, shaking the little regiments of black curls which stood out at either side of her brilliantly and freshly painted cheeks, she said:

"It is time, monsieur; this morning I bade Clémentine bring our rouge-pots from their hiding-places and let the roses once again bloom in our faces, for monsieur,"—and here the marquise rapped on the stone pavement emphat-

ically with her gold-headed cane—"surely, soon now, we may look for our king; the nineteenth Louis must be on his way."

To all of the above mademoiselle gave docile assent by nods and smilings and little "oh's" and "ah's." She seemed to be, in all respects, perhaps, save one, but the echo of her sister the marquise.

"As befits an unmarried woman," held the married one, "even tho her years may number into the sixties."

The abbé, docile also, still had views of his own, and with a slowly wagging head, and a deliberate pinch of snuff, he replied:

"Alas, mesdames!"—the abbé always said "mesdames," thus obviating the necessity of making any separate acknowledgment of mademoiselle's existence—"alas, mesdames, so far as I can

learn from the meagre reports which come to us, there is some rumor that his majesty will assume the title of Philippe the Eighth, altho this is by no means certain."

"Absurd!" cried both ladies in a breath. "It was already decided long since, that his majesty would assume the throne as Louis the Nineteenth, and assuredly, since neither Henry the Fifth nor Philippe the Seventh was received with the enthusiasm which was their divine right, it is but common sense to turn one's luck and place the nation under the direct protection of its patron, Saint Louis, by continuing the succession in his blessed name."

"Very true, mesdames," returned the abbé, tendering his snuff-box with an equal grace to either of his companions; "yet it is also true that common sense

is a quality which maintains a very different foundation in different minds."

"Can it be possible," cried the marquise, lifting her bright little eyes to the sky, and her thin little hands in the air, while mademoiselle duplicated these movements to perfection, "can it be possible that we shall be called upon to mourn for another of our kings in exile, before the prophecy of our revered and sainted grandmama shall come to its fulfilment? No, monsieur, no!" The marquise rose and paced up and down the terrace in the sunshine, tapping off its length with the click of her little red heels and the tip of her cane.

"I tell you, I feel it. I, Rénée Marie Alphonsine Laure, Marquise de Brimont, born de la Coutrée, am sure that on me the mantle of my grandmama now falls, when I inform you that it will not

be long before France rises to greet the Restoration!"

Mademoiselle had also risen and was hopping up and down the terrace exactly behind her sister, in perfect reproduction of all, save voice; mademoiselle rarely raised her voice.

"To welcome," continued the marquise, the regiments of curls quivering with excitement, "Louis the Nineteenth to his own. Believe me, monsieur, and mademoiselle," concluded the marquise, taking up her cup of chocolate, "for, at our age"—she now spoke succinctly, leaving declamation in the rear—"one may not hope to mourn a Philippe the Eighth and survive to greet his successor. If our esteemed grandmama prophesied truly, then are we on the edge of a great revolution, a revolution which restores the Bourbon lilies to

their white field, which gives to us and our downtrodden countrymen the enlightenments and benefits of a kingly rule."

By which it may be inferred that the marquise, notwithstanding her years, still could play the rôle of partisan with force.

Mademoiselle nodded as she also took up her chocolate-cup. The abbé pulled from his pocket a little worn volume of sermons, and, adjusting his horn-rimmed spectacles, he was turning the well-thumbed leaves when the marquise covered the sugar-bowl with that peculiar vehemence which caused mademoiselle gently to touch the abbé's shoulder, in turn causing the abbé to close his book, grimace his spectacles off his queer little nose, and turn once again back to the marquise.

Clearing her throat, playing a tripping minuet tune with her little fingers on the polished top of the table, her voice shaking somewhat, the marquise began in a high and strident tone:

"I have to inform you, monsieur, and you, my sister, that I have sent for Maître Tonton at Brimont-Aujillac, to come, and, for the fourth time, alter our wills; first, all was left to his majesty Louis Philippe; then to the others of our well-beloved sovereigns in the order of their several successions. It now becomes necessary and not longer to be delayed." Here the marquise paused as thrice before she had paused in this identical speech, and Monsieur l'Abbé at once filled the breach precisely as he has filled it on all the former occasions.

"Not longer to be delayed," repeated the old man, "considering the uncer-

tainty of human life, the advanced age of mesdames, and the unscrupulous dealings of those who may be left here after their departure."

"Exactly," nodded the marquise. "Maître Tonton will make the new documents in favor of his most Catholic majesty, Louis the Nineteenth, King of France. Mademoiselle!"—the little lady turned dictatorially to her sister—"you will, of course, see to it that Maître Tonton draws up a new will for you on the same terms."

Mademoiselle courtesied to this as, in point of fact, she had always courtesied to all that her sister had said or done, since she was sixteen and had been brought to live at Brimont-Taube—except one thing. Once upon a time mademoiselle refused to echo; declined to courtesy. It was when she was cele-

brating her seventeenth birthday. Of her own volition the young girl had chosen that time to vow herself to the Virgin and to celibacy, until France should once more acknowledge a king; to dedicate her fortunes to the house of Bourbon and never to marry until a king of France could give her his consent and blessing—Mademoiselle Marie Sylvie Amélie Adelaïde de la Coutrée being, or at least she would have been, had there been a reigning monarch, a ward of the king.

This vow was taken at six o'clock in the morning in the chapel of the château, in the presence of the Abbé de la Toinette, the marquise, all the servants and dependents of the estate; also before the high altar and the good God, and all his Saints and Martyrs.

It is quite true that at that time mademoiselle had no suitor.

It is also true that by seven o'clock that night a suitor came in the person of the Chevalier Pierre de St. Joreaux, a gentleman of noble lineage, noble character and the grand manners of the old régime; of so handsome a face that mademoiselle had remarked the same to Clémentine, and had in the making of her morning vow not left out of consideration the sad fact that the chevalier always kept a great distance from her when they met at the houses of friends, or at the chase, and seemed riveted to some spot always within eye reach, but never nearer.

Therefore it was doubly cruel that the Chevalier Pierre, having stolen a moment and borrowed heart of grace from the starlight, and told made-

moiselle of his passion for her, should have to hear of the dedication of his lady love to the fortunes of the house of Bourbon!

"It is but a girl's excuse!" cried the chevalier, in wrath, after listening to mademoiselle's hurried recital. "It is indeed! Figure to yourself! I, too, mademoiselle, am loyal to my king, but I see very plainly that it is rather the hump on my back than the lost crown of our sovereign which bids you decline my suit!" For the chevalier was indeed a hunchbacked man.

Whereupon mademoiselle had fallen weeping straight into the outstretched arms of her lover just as her sister, the marquise, had come out on the terrace with the abbé and a torch to look for her.

And so it came to pass that at this point mademoiselle refused to echo or to courtesy to the decrees of her elder. The marquise said that the chevalier must go and never return. Mademoiselle said that twice every week the chevalier should be permitted, since this was his humble request, to come to see her, and that, once the king at Brimont-Taube, once the white emblem floating on the tower of the chateau to welcome him, then she would marry the chevalier, whether it might be next week or a hundred years hence!

But the days and the months and the years came, and went, and no king's ship sailed into the bay of Taube and no wedding bells rang for mademoiselle; but the chevalier came twice a week still, just as he had from the beginning. And while the marquise and the abbé played

chess in the salon, mademoiselle and the chevalier walked in the gardens under the box-trees cut in the shapes of castles and birds; or paced up and down the gallery, from whose walls looked down portraits of the long line of the kings and queens and dauphins of the house of Bourbon; the glorious Henri Quatre, all the great and little men named Louis; Anne of Austria, Marie Antoinette, Louis the Seventeenth, the hapless child of the Temple who never felt the weight of crown or sceptre, and whose strange and not known fate still aches at our hearts when we stop to think of him. All these were the witnesses and chaperons when the chevalier, no higher than mademoiselle's shoulder, but the soul of gallantry for all his lacking inches, would tenderly whisper—ah! just as tenderly tonight when he was seventy

and his charmer sixty-eight as long ago in the June time of their youth.

"But, Marie, my well-beloved, indeed I believe I have served very faithfully and patiently, and I am of the opinion that his Holiness would listen favorably to an application, through Monsieur l'Abbé, for a release from your vow. Eh, my dear child, what do you say?" And the chevalier now raised to his lips the small and still white and pretty hand of mademoiselle.

"But no, monsieur; imagine," returned Marie Sylvie gently, "one could not ask to be released from a vow of that nature. It is for our king, Pierre." Mademoiselle's voice sank to as tender a whisper as when she was a girl, and her curls quivered each side of her cheeks, just like the marquise's.

"Pierre, I shall be yours some day when our king comes."

"Ah, always the same response! Well, then, suppose our king never comes?" inquired the chevalier testily.

"That is impossible. We have already buried their late majesties." Mademoiselle crossed herself. "That was to be expected, since grandmama said we must be patient until Louis the Nineteenth came. She spoke with her dying breath. Monsieur l'Abbé says, beyond a doubt, the good Saint Louis dictated her words. And now, do you not think, my dear friend, that the hour, the moment, must be at hand when the message will arrive from his majesty, saying——?"

The sharp clank of a horse's hoofs on the roadway, the clash of the iron gates, the hobble of the abbé across the great

hall, the click of the marquise's heels and the tap of the marquise's cane; the opening of the great doors as the horse came to a sudden standstill; voices—all these sounds arrested the speech of mademoiselle, and caused her and the chevalier to turn and hasten down the gallery, where all the Bourbons were watching them, and cross out into the great hall and join the others.

They arrived just as Philibert, the innkeeper from Brimont-Aujillac, was bowing himself out of the door. Clémentine held a double candelabra high up in the air, the marquise was on tiptoe, while the abbé, having settled his spectacles, stared hard at the superscription of a large, white, square envelope which he had received at the hands of his patroness.

"Well, well, monsieur, is it thus that I must wait for a man of your learning and accomplishments to decipher the address of a letter!" The marquise tapped the parquet angrily with her cane, while the chevalier whispered to mademoiselle:

"Now, God grant this be a letter from the king!"

"Um—um—um!" murmured the worthy priest, sore beset by his first introduction to a strictly modern handwriting.

"Just heaven! Monsieur l'Abbé!" cried the marquise, in a tempest, "is it for this that I have harbored you for these forty-odd years in order that you might not only minister to our spiritual needs, but read our letters, cast up our accounts, et cetera, et cetera, now to have you set gaping at the sight of a

letter that may be—?" Here the marquise almost choked with her emotions, and seized the letter with no gentle hand.

"I will read it myself!" she exclaimed, as Clémentine held the candelabra higher still above her mistress's shoulder, and the chevalier struck a tinder and lighted a torch, while he and mademoiselle gathered close about the marquise in open-mouthed and extraordinary impatience.

"Yes, mesdames," answered the abbé solemnly and respectfully; "if you can."

The marquise peered; so did mademoiselle, also the chevalier, likewise Clémentine, who could not read at all.

Then the marquise, stamping her foot so that all the other four jumped

with terror, thrust the letter back into the abbé's hands and commanded:

"Read it, monsieur, if you know how to read at all. If you cannot I must at once procure a chaplain whose education is not so lacking!"

They waited a minute, perhaps two or three, when the old man slowly spelled out, "To Madame la Marquise de Brimont, Brimont-Taube, Languedoc, France."

"Aha!" cried the marquise, "it is then for me! And the postmark is——?"

"Paris," returned the abbé, reading so much with ease.

"Now, mesdames," he added, looking, however, as always, only at the marquise, "at your orders?"

"It will be best to open it, I should say," said the marquise, "since you,

monsieur, seem unable to devise its origin otherwise."

"That is quite the fact," returned the abbé, meekly ignoring the scorn of his benefactress.

"Stop! Since it may be from his sacred majesty, it is best that I should cut the envelope with my own hands!"

The marquise received from Clémentine a pair of pocket-scissors, and slit open the letter. She unfolded the broad square sheet, and, with an air of tender reverence, held it before the eyes of the abbé, for in fact the marquise was no scholar.

"Read, monsieur," she said.

So, while the chevalier and Clémentine held the lights, while mademoiselle held her breath and the marquise held the paper, the abbé began: "Hotel du Petit St. Eustache, Rue la Rose Blanche, Number 11, Paris."

[II]

II

THE rue la Rose Blanche was very narrow, very gloomy. The sun only shone into it for a half hour once a day, at high noon. Its pavement was broken and rough, the despair of the very infrequent cab-horses and of the few small children—all Americans and Spaniards, for the French child seems someway to be eliminated from the Paris streets—who played mournfully with their dolls and their roller-skates under the windows of the Hôtel Petit St. Eustache, and beneath the shrill supervision of Madame Caroline, the wife of the proprietor, who called them momently to order from the office back of the porte-cochère.

It was just now midday, and about a fortnight before the evening when the Marquise de Brimont had received the letter dated from this same number rue la Rose Blanche. The sun, yellow and warm, sifted down between the tall lines of houses and walked gloriously in at the two rather grimy windows of a room on the fourth floor, slanted across the dingy rug, and fell full upon the beautiful bronze-brown hair of a young girl of perhaps twenty, who stood in a very picturesque attitude leaning against the tiny mantel-shelf, one elbow there, the other 'kimboed at the turn of her waist. She had on a crimson gown, long-trained, somewhat frayed and a bit spotted, but gay with silver fringes and spangles, girdled with a paste-set zone; crimson silk stockings and no shoes; and in her lifted hand she held a forlorn

and withered Jacqueminot rose. She regarded herself in the mirror over the chimney place with a mixture of scorn and complacency.

All sorts of motley-hued garments were strewn about the room; photographs of most of the stage celebrities of the hour were stuck in every possible place; the table was littered with little play-books, foils, writing materials and the apparatus of the toilet.

The young girl from time to time repeated one sentence over and over and over again, with varying but apparently unsatisfactory degrees of emotion, since she still went on monotonously after a solid half-hour of its repetition.

"'When a man loves me he tells me everything.'"

This is what this young girl, whose

name was Pauline de la Coutrée-Ackerman, constantly said.

It is a sentence from Sardou's play of "Fedora," which Miss Ackerman was studying, among others, under the direction of Madame Reeb—the great and celebrated Reeb who had launched a dozen stars of the first magnitude upon the difficult sea of dramatic enterprise; whose classes were the hardest to obtain admission to in the whole of Paris; whose name was one to conjure with; whose salons of every Sunday were among the most beguiling entertainments, also distinctly the most characteristically cosmopolitan—shall it be termed?—of all those for which Paris is so justly celebrated; who was an autocrat of the first class, as might be expected, since the rotary of talent had now established Madame Reeb in a posi-

tion most singularly contrary to that which might have been augured from her earlier career as a *chanteuse diabolique.*

"Well, well," as one of the frequenters of her salons had remarked, "it perhaps requires one who has run the whole gamut herself to know exactly how to show the youth of a later generation at which note to stop short."

The Duc de Monplaisir had said this; his mamma, whose papa was a magnificent brigand living in a cave on the side of Etna, had been a *chanteuse excentrique* and a compeer of the great Reeb; she had early in life married a baker at Sorrento and later had been created Duchesse de Monplaisir by his majesty, Napoleon Third. The present duke was therefore the first of his line, now about thirty years of age, remark-

ably handsome, witty, accomplished and courageous, a *viveur* of the first order and said to be the best judge of wines in France. A photograph of his grace occupied a place of honor on Miss Ackerman's toilet-table, in a silver frame, with at present a bunch of violets in a broken-stemmed wine-glass standing up against it.

This young girl was an American. She had a mother who had brought her to Paris; seen her comfortably and correctly settled at the Hôtel Petit St. Eustache, where half a dozen other of her compatriots were also domiciled, and, also, most of them pursuing that hydra-headed, manifolded will-o'-the-wisp they call art; some as painters, who should most have been breadmakers; some as singers, whose obvious path lay toward nursery-governessing; others as

actresses, who seemed to the ordinary eye palpably informed by nature for strictly home consumption.

Pauline Ackerman, however, had talent of a certain and very positive kind; she possessed atmosphere, distinction, poise, aplomb, and a singularly pertinent and just sense of her own artistic and theatric values.

Yet just because she had the talent, she was possibly, since this seems to be the universal law with young women studying for the stage, quite eager and ready, could it have been possible, to throw the sock and buskin to the winds and leave the stage to supply itself otherwise; all for the sake of Louis, Duc de Monplaisir, to whom she had betrothed herself, now some three months since.

The hour which Reeb said must be spent in "Fedora's" cause having expired, Pauline crossed the little room and took up the portrait of her lover; she looked at it long and earnestly, and her lovely face flushed with that most splendid enthusiasm of youth, the godly thought that at this man's side she could rise to those heights of goodness, worth, benevolence and power, which—that same God ever assisting us—all his creatures are capable of, though few manifest the fact.

She pressed her lips, half shyly, upon the picture, sighed, and could she but have known it, the better part of her at that moment slipped away into the past, which is, to some ways of thinking, as eternal as the future, and more hopeless, since it is unrecoverable.

The thump of wheels, the shrieks, both of American children and Madame Caroline in their behalf, the curses of the cabmen, the laughter of some passers-by, all fell unheeded on Pauline's ear, as she stood there, with the last glint of the sun glorifying and ennobling her face. She did not even hear the bump of the trunks that were taken from the top of the cab, nor Madame Caroline's squabble with the cabman over his *pour boire,* nor the heavy tread of Angelo, the porter, coming up the long flights, nor the lighter footsteps which preceded him.

There was a tap at the door and almost simultaneously it was opened. Pauline looked up.

A well-dressed, pretty, rather jaunty looking woman of probably forty-four stood smiling in the entrance.

"Mother!"

"Pauline!" And they were in each other's arms.

"I am so glad you have come," the girl said when they were alone, a bit of luncheon eaten and the disagreeableness of a journey from Scotland fully described.

"Why, I had to come," replied the older woman, quite vividly transatlantic with the inevitable "why," notwithstanding her five years of European knocking about.

"After such a letter as your last I simply told the Eastcourts I must go to you at once; I regretted your attitude, my dear, more than I can express, for I am positive, had I been able to stop a week longer, I should have had the opportunity of accepting or refusing the Honorable Percy Eastcourt of East

Lodge, Surrey, and Park Lane, London!"

"Oh, mother!"—Pauline smiled and shook her head—"not another slip of the cup surely? Don't you know you're always, dearest, just going to—refuse someone? Really, now, the situation here with me demands your presence."

"Well," returned Mrs. Ackerman good humoredly, "what is the trouble, anyway? Your letters were so vague and so inscrutable I could make out nothing except that I must come. Is it money?"

"No!" Pauline answered quickly, "it's not money. That has always been an ever-present worry and fret! but it is not on that account that I wanted you. Mother——" The girl slipped to the floor from her perch on the little bed,

she placed her head on her mother's knee and sighed, with that strange content that even the shallowest mother, it is said, can confer upon her weary child.

Mrs. Ackerman bent and kissed the beautiful, soft, thick hair, and the two women's hands met and clasped closely.

"Then, I suppose, it is about the duke, about Louis?" the older asked gently.

The girl nodded slowly.

"Well, tell me all about it, my dear," Mrs. Ackerman said with a sigh. "I trust it is not broken off?" This was eagerly added.

Pauline shook her head, slowly too.

"Ah!" exclaimed the mother in a relieved tone, "then it is not so bad, after all!" She withdrew her hand from her daughter's and sat up straight in her perfectly fitting brown gown. Mrs.

Ackerman was the possessor of a fine figure, read the papers, frequented the beautifiers and knew that at her age one cannot afford to indulge either in lax poses or in too much emotion.

Pauline laughed as she took back her hand, clasped it and its mate around her up-drawn knees and poked out one small foot to the meagre warmth of the minute fire in the grate.

"My dear child, where are your shoes?"

"Yonder on the window-seat. Reeb makes me study two hours a day in my stockings, dear, so as to obtain the *pose plastique* from the feet up—see? Dear old mammy, don't look so horrified! Art has devious paths; some of them must be taken unshod!"

Mrs. Ackerman drew in her lips very firmly until, catching a glimpse of her-

self in the mirror opposite, she remembered the adjurations of the beautifiers and instantly undid them.

"It strikes me, Pauline, that since you are really engaged to a man of title and position, a man who must have some means in order to live as you wrote me that the duke does live, in your letters; the flowers, the bonbons, the carriages for you and your friends, the boxes at the opera, the races, the dinners—it is about time for you to discard this stage idea and set about purchasing—your trousseau, eh?" Mrs. Ackerman laughed pleasantly.

"There you are—not, mother!" Pauline said. "I am engaged; Louis is all impatience—or he was—to see you and make his formal proposition for my hand; but about three weeks ago there seemed to come a change." The girl's

head lowered so that her round chin lay buried in the little ruffles and ruches of her gown.

"Oh, mother, I don't know, I don't know! It is there, I can feel it, and yet he is just as tender and devoted as ever —only—there is a difference, a little, little shadow."

"Well," returned the other woman briskly, "I wouldn't feel so very badly, my dear. Just tell me who you think the other woman is, and I will see what can be done."

"The other woman!" Pauline sprang to her feet in a fashion that for suppleness and intensity of expression would have joyed the soul of Reeb. "Oh," she cried, a little under her breath, "there is none! If there were it would be easier, for one could not want the man to whom 'the other wom-

an' were possible; one would feel that one had made a mistake and—look forward."

She raised her eyes now to meet those of the photograph on the toilet-table, and it was obvious that her heart lay there.

"It's worse than that, dearest, I think." Pauline now laughed, too, in a manner that would please the great Reeb; she sat on the heavy centre-table, swinging her feet back and forth and pushing her long hair from her flushed cheeks.

Mrs. Ackerman regarded her daughter with an air of puzzled speculation; this phase of Pauline was new to her.

"You see, you started me here, I mean at Reeb's, and among all the queer and not queer people of this part of Paris, as an heiress. Before you left me to

the chaperonage of Madame Caroline everybody was thoroughly apprized of the fact that I was the great-grand-niece and heiress—*soi disant!*—of the wealthy and eccentric Marquise de Brimont and of her sister, Mademoiselle de la Coutrée."

"So you are their great-grand-niece!" interrupted Mrs. Ackerman with asperity. "Their elder brother, Albert Léonce Lionel de la Coutrée, emigrated to Louisiana in seventeen something or other, married, had a daughter, who married an Ackerman and was the mother of your father. I'm sure that's straight as a die, and I can prove it, too."

"Yes, dear, I know; but, after all, I suspect the lineage isn't half the consequence of the inheritance. Now, I am not the heiress of those two respectable

old ladies at all unless they were to will it so, which they are hardly likely to do, since we have never seen one another and they are wholly unaware of my existence!"

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Ackerman in evident irritation. "Of course, in the strict sense, you're not their heiress; for all I know they may have a dozen children apiece. I merely supposed it would be a good card for you to speak of the relationship, and I certainly didn't mean any harm by mentioning casually something about your being their heiress. I can tell you one thing——" Mrs. Ackerman now rose and unlocked and unstrapped her trunks—"you would never have received the attention you have from Reeb; you would never have been given

the entrée of her salon; you would never have"—the mother's voice rose with the length of her remarks, manifesting conclusively that the noble blood which may have flowed in her child's veins came through the paternal line—"captured a duke, miss, if I had not said just what I did say! American girls without portions are quite at a discount, even in the Continental title market!"

"I think," Pauline finally said after a pause which she had spent in just one little poor prayer heavenward, the words of which were, "God help me, for there is no one else"—"I think you are correct." Her tone was cool and formal. "I think the absence of a *dot* is the cause of the duke's change of manner."

"What did you tell him the truth

for?" asked the older woman, angrily, shaking out her folded gowns.

"I told him nothing about it."

"Stuff and nonsense! Then you have gotten some silly idea into your head—some romantic rubbish. If the man loves you—" Mrs. Ackerman stopped short in spreading a silk bodice over a chair-back and looked sharply at her daughter. "Doesn't he love you?"

"I believe that he does." There was a curious reverence in Pauline's voice, as one reluctantly forced to unveil her sanctuary.

"Why, then it's all right! Get married as fast as possible! Once madame la duchesse, all will be easy enough. Even if you have to go upon the stage, a title is a sure winner, and as you have ability, why, what more do you want?"

"Less, perhaps!" Pauline Ackerman said, quite to herself.

"See here," continued the mother, "you just leave the duke to me. I'll befuddle him with some pretty stories of the dear old marquise, and at the same time frighten him into the belief that I will not permit you to marry him—republican prejudices against titles; rather see you the 'wife of a good, plain American,' and all that sort of thing; then, if he cares a sou about you—why, you'll elope before you know it! He has no father nor mother, and so French law has no hand in the matter."

Pauline sat down, quite still.

"Aha!" pursued Mrs. Ackerman blithely, "these men, I know how to manage them! I wasn't the wife and helpmeet of a land-improvement promoter for nothing! Why, my dear

child, your father's business wouldn't have amounted to a row of pins in a year, if I hadn't turned in and put my shoulder to the wheel. He always wanted to refuse to push any scheme that wasn't *bona fide*. I had to urge, and beg, and argue—it meant bread and butter—as well as jam and cake—and then when I'd won him over, forsooth, I was the one to meet the capitalists every time; dine them, wine them, rope them in. Leave his grace to your mother, my dear, and—don't, for heaven's sake, sit there and look like a picture of despair!"

Pauline, however, did sit still, just a little longer, and it was quite possible that the rival elements and foundations of her being were warring within her; quite possible that the two spirits, the one of the "promoter" and the other of

the promoter's wife, wrestled together within their child's soul for the mastery.

"May I inquire," the mother remarked suavely, "what you have on that done-out evening gown for at this time of the day, and also where the room is that you have engaged for me?"

"Reeb makes me do all my studying in an evening gown, when the rôle is one demanding it. Your room, mother, is the same old one"—she rose and opened the door leading into another apartment—"you had last year. See, you can sleep in here, and it will serve as a little sitting- or reception-room."

"Just so; where I can receive the duke, eh? By the way, is he due, or what have you on for this evening?"

"Oh, tonight? Sunday! it is Reeb's night; have you forgotten the famous Sundays in the rue de Helder? Mother,

Louis will be there; he always is, and you will meet, and you must like him."

"Probably," returned Mrs. Ackerman with an equivocal smile. "It is, however, more probable that he won't be quite as sure of your mama after he has seen her as before! You had better lie down now and get into form; you look fagged. I do, too!"

But, at half-after six neither of the two women looked as if they could ever have presented a "fagged" appearance.

Mrs. Ackerman was charmingly easeful, both as to face and ensemble; smooth, pink and white, admirably coiffed, well gowned and groomed; black satin, jet, a bit of old lace, a diamond pin, a white aigrette, svelte, almost unctuous. Her daughter was radiant, one of those young creatures whose rose blood flies its jubilant flag

in their cheeks whenever candlelight and the hour for what Continental nations call "distraction" arrives; tall, lithe, swathed in some black-spangled gauzy stuff, setting off the creamy shoulders and long arms; a rope of big mock pearls twisted around her throat and her bronze hair in a bewildering and presumably artistic tangle all about her face and ears; her bodice slipped a trifle at the waist line away from the trailing skirt, but a pin caught the two together again after a fashion. A hook was missing in the bodice, but another pin did obvious duty there, and the general effect was striking—as of riotous adolescence, not yet quite whipped into the definite nondescriptness of perfect breeding or perfect *savoir faire*.

It was curious, but true, that those missing hooks, those slipping waist-

bands, those ever-present pins in Pauline Ackerman's make-up, had the effect upon some persons of creating a distinct distrust; conveying to those supersensitive individuals the impression of a moral or mental laxity—which the young woman's conduct so far had on no wise carried out.

Be that as it may, when the mother and daughter entered the dining-room of the Hôtel Petit St. Eustache their appearance produced a veritable sensation among the strange mixed company always to be met at the table d'hôte of such houses.

Madame Caroline herself felt a degree of positive shame at the table outfit, and to the eyes of Angelo, who did double duty with trunks and platters, the two little glass dishes at either end of the board, each containing seven

gum-drops of assorted colors, the ten lady's-fingers, split into halves to make twenty morsels and piled in the epergne criss-cross, with five figs and three limes as a foundation, appeared absolutely ridiculous to set before such grand and gracious ladies. The old watchmaker regarded the supposed heiress as a vision of fairyland; the young scene-painter of the opera vainly essayed to fix her features in his memory tonight and on his canvas-remnants tomorrow; the old lady who made lace spoke to the saints in her prayers of the *belle Americaine,* and besought that they might bring her safely into the mother church; while the two young ladies, one of whom danced in the third row of the ballet, her sister making up the faces one after another in a row, of the coryphées at the Porte St. Martin every night, beheld in

this blooming, happy and thought-to-be-rich demoiselle, the acme of all things desirable, and a future artiste as great, maybe, as the great Reeb herself.

For them, one and all, Pauline had a bright smile, a kindly word; to her the intentional and perfected haughtiness of her mother was impossible. Swayed by the flow of a sympathetic or admiring current, she loved approbation too well ever to forfeit its possibility; yet she had her reticences, which were more profound, more full of meaning than the exclusiveness of her mother.

They dined; the cab came (at the same moment a bunch of magnificent Jaque roses from the duke). They drove to the house in the rue de Helder, and presently were entering the salon of Reeb.

The salon in itself was a curio, with which *"tout Paris"* — a descriptive phrase, it will be recalled, which is interchangeably used by very different circles of people, to indicate his or her own special world—*"tout Paris,"* then, of artists, musicians, composers, writers, journalists, poets, novelists, actors, actresses, men about town, men of position in diplomacy, society, lineage and so forth, was quite familiar. The walls and floors were covered with tiger skins entirely; so was the one sofa; the ceiling represented the starlighted sky. The light was solely from candles in tall crystal branches. On the sofa sat Reeb. No one else could sit in the room, for there was not another seat, save the piano-stool, and it was permanently held by the accompanist.

Reeb, long since having forgotten the days when she was a *chanteuse diabolique*—they were not many, for her marvelous art had soon demonstrated itself and shown her to the world as the greatest Frou-frou, the greatest Marguerite Gautier, the greatest Theodora ever imagined—Reeb at this moment stood, fair, slender as ever, sinuous as the sleekest adder, her wonderful Hebrew eyes still dominant with juvenility and magnetism; her mat of yellow hair still shadowing them in golden coquetry; her neck bare and white, without a string or jewel to mar its breadth or length; her hands down hanging, her smile full of the witchery that the oldest man in the room could associate with his youth.

Well, it was superb, miraculous, until Pauline Ackerman came in and went

up to her and for a moment stood beside her preceptress. Then Reeb became the most impudent counterfeit under the sun.

Witty, wise that she was, she sent the pupil across the room, saying to the mother whom she invited to the sofa:

"Mademoiselle is still herself; I"—with an infinitesimal lift of the shoulders—"I, madame, am but the portrait of Reeb in her youth. Pigments turn green, madame, with envy"—Reeb laughs musically—"when they are put side by side with real flesh and blood!"

Reeb, then, was an institution; one of the people that make Paris what it is; her salon suited Mrs. Ackerman well, but not as well as it suited Mrs. Ackerman's daughter. The older woman was keenly ambitious, and felt Reeb's social limitations, nowhere as marked

as in her own city. The younger enjoyed the sensations of an explorer in a new country; she aspired to nothing as yet any higher, nor did she quite appreciate the exact standing of her present position. Pauline loved, had met the man in this house, and so this love glorified and haloed even Reeb!

The Duc de Monplaisir awaited her when she arrived. Presently she presented him to her mother; and it is quite the fact that he experienced a slight surprise when Mrs. Ackerman surveyed him with aplomb, did not extend that haughty American hand to his, to which all his previous encounters with *ces dames americaines* had accustomed him, and seemed to regard him with an eye wholly divorced from a sense of what he considered the current value of his title.

In short, the evening ended with but a courteous acquiescence on the part of Mrs. Ackerman, when the duke asked permission to call next day and pay his respects to her; and this was vouchsafed only when he was assisting the two ladies into their cab.

But the duke was of that disposition which quickly rallies; he mentally solved the problem of Mrs. Ackerman's coolness in short order, and realized the situation correctly by setting down *madame la mère* as a very clever worldly-wise woman, who had heard of his slight change of demeanor and did not intend to tolerate it.

The duke loved Pauline very dearly; "to distraction, to death, to the last drop of his blood," he would have sworn to you; but he was not a fool, nor yet a Baron Hirsch.

He reentered Reeb's salon, and sat there playing écarté, and losing heavily until four o'clock Monday morning. He was extremely sorry that he had not won those five thousand francs for two reasons: one was that had he, he would have felt more sure of his ability to take care of a wife on a pasteboard basis; the other, of little importance, was, that although he had no intention of paying Reeb, she would never cease to annoy him with reminders of the debt.

He walked home in the early spring freshness, feeling the wind blow up in his face from the Seine. When he reached his room at the top of a tall hôtel back of the Madeleine, he poured out some absinthe, tilting the glass toward Pauline's photograph on the wall as he drained it.

[III]

III

"WELL, today at three o'clock madame la mère must be met," he said, "and if there is no way of obtaining money—" His grace struck a match, lighted a cigar and cursed the lost battle of Sedan with considerable violence.

At the hour appointed, however, he was at the Hôtel Petit St. Eustache, immaculate as to manner and dress. Madame Caroline, glowing with honest pride, called loudly to Angelo to announce to Madame Ackerman that "Monsieur the Duc de Monplaisir was in the salon and would she be pleased to descend, or should monsieur the duke come up?"

Monsieur the duke would kindly condescend to mount; which he did, and was received by madame with a slightly less glacial air than that of the night before. Mademoiselle was invisible, but perfectly within hearing, as the duke instantly divined with his ready and keenly observant habit of mind.

After a few not glittering but distinctly dull generalities, the man plunged into his subject and object, as a brave man should. In fact, the duke had no hesitations; it is hardly to be expected that the grandson of a brigand and the son of a *chanteuse excentrique* would be burdened that way. He said:

"Madame, I love, I adore, I worship mademoiselle, your daughter."

Mrs. Ackerman inclined her head as though listening to an oft-told tale.

"I desire, madame, to ask your consent to the marriage of your daughter and myself."

Mrs. Ackerman really smiled and her muscles relaxed; and she quite forgot the beautifier's advice for the nonce and did not hasten to gather them up again.

"I cannot, madame, live without"—here the duke rose and crossed the little room, crossed back again and brought up standing before Mrs. Ackerman, with his hand upon his heart, and bowing very low—"your daughter. Madame, will you deign to look with favor upon my suit? Will you set the seal of your complaisant approbation upon the exchange of these vows which mademoiselle has doubtless already apprised you of?"

Mrs. Ackerman's perfectly collected pause at this juncture caused her vis-

itor a very uncomfortable one hundred and twenty seconds; for, as has been said, he loved Pauline with all the love of which he was capable, and with the customary logic of love he hoped for all those adjuncts which he at present could not see any prospect of obtaining.

"Monsieur," at last said Mrs. Ackerman, "I appreciate to the fullest extent the honor you would confer upon my daughter, but before I can consent to part with her I must inform myself whether the man who seeks her is one to whom not only she herself may be safely intrusted, but"—Mrs. Ackerman's level brows lifted slightly, her smile was deprecatory, the wave of her jeweled hand was airy—"I must also be assured that he is not seeking my child from mercenary motives; that he is a

person who will be capable"—Mrs. Ackerman stopped in a leisurely way now to clear her throat—"capable," repeated she, "of administering the five millions of francs to which, as you doubtless are aware, my daughter is heiress."

Pauline, on the other side of the closed door, sitting in a fever of impatience, jumped to her feet, and fairly gasped at this splendid assertion.

Louis Eugène Napoleon, Duc de Monplaisir, did not move, except the beautiful lids of his dreamy eyes, these twitched a trifle in sympathy with his lips under his moustache. It was now his time to pause.

He again crossed over to the window, folded his arms on his chest and came back to Mrs. Ackerman, noting by the

way her triumphant pose on the stiff haircloth sofa.

"Madame," said the duke, laying his hand upon the back of the small rush-bottomed chair which he placed near his hostess, "it is a fortune of fifty millions of francs—and mademoiselle is the sole heiress?" with a slight but noticeable emphasis upon the words "fifty" and "sole."

Mrs. Ackerman looked at the duke with a puzzled but by no means unguarded expression.

Her daughter on the other side of the thin partition, panted with suppressed excitement.

Mrs. Ackerman now inclined her head in unconcerned assent, as one might who had made an unimportant error, and said, in a continuing tone:

"The estate is situated in Normandy."

"In Languedoc, madame, pardon me," murmured the duke, now resting both hands on the chair-back, with an expostulatory shrug.

"Yes, yes, you are correct," assented the mother, now fairly bewildered, but still maintaining a calm exterior; "in Languedoc."

"Yes, madame, the Château de Brimont, also the town of Brimont-Aujillac, with its rich silk-factories; the villages and farms, vineyards, wine-presses and olive-groves of Brimont-Taube; the fisheries of Taube-sur-Mer; also the immense collection of jewels, paintings, works of art; the rents, the bonds, the stocks, the investments, both of Madame la Marquise de Brimont and of her spinster sister, Made-

moiselle de la Coutrée, are solely the legal heritage of my beloved Pauline."

It is occasion which brings elemental capacities to the fore; and occasion cannot be created, it must come. De Monplaisir thought that his occasion had arrived.

As he now placed his chair several inches nearer to his hostess and leaned in her direction with a somewhat confidential air, Mrs. Ackerman felt that in some mysterious way, whip, reins and spur had slipped from her superintendence into the keeping of the young man whose handsome eyes were bent upon her face.

With the ready tact which had so often served her, she now drew herself up haughtily and regarded her *vis-à-vis* with scorn.

"It seems, then, that monsieur has been at great pains to acquaint himself with all the minutiæ of my daughter's prospects; it is possibly not too much to infer that monsieur is even more interested in the estates to which my daughter is heiress than—in my daughter herself."

Mrs. Ackerman, having been vouchsafed information which she hitherto had not even suspected, and from a source not to be impugned, immediately, like the experienced person she was, set about using her freshly acquired weapons.

Pauline, meantime, stood with her young lips set hard together, wondering; and as yet the wonder was all toward Love's conquest, with scarcely a thought for the balance on the other side.

"Madame!" exclaimed Louis de Monplaisir, as if cut to the quick, and drawing back from his companion, "it is unkind, ungenerous so to accuse me. Listen, madame, I implore of you!" Now springing to his feet and setting the chair away against the wall. "And then, after I have been permitted to explain myself—condemn me if you will!"

Mrs. Ackerman inclined her head graciously; indeed, she had not the slightest idea of letting the young nobleman out of her sight until she had obtained all the details of her child's prospective possessions; and as she made the motion of condescending acquiescence, visions of such splendors as she had never before dreamed of flitted through her active brain.

The duke, for the second time, brought forward the little chair and seated himself in front of the mother of his adored Pauline.

"Madame," he exclaimed, in a voice modulated exquisitely, yet not lacking the timbre of absolute matter-of-factness, "it is most true that I have had the interests of mademoiselle, your daughter, more at heart, it seems, than anyone else in the world, not excepting madame, your most amiable self. Yes, madame," continued the duke with emphasis, "this is a fact. To you, madame, the details of mademoiselle's inheritance, the names of her legacies, the amount of her fortune were unknown until a few moments since. Is it not so?"

Mrs. Ackerman, still clinging to her customs, coolly replied:

"My dear duke, with those little matters I have not occupied myself."

"But I—I have! Yes, madame, a Frenchman, when he loves, when he wishes to marry, looks into the future and sees there, when there is no income, much unhappiness; he beholds his wife, his children, himself without those necessities and luxuries to which he has ever been used. He calculates how he is to obtain them, and when this seems impossible he withdraws, madame, in honor, and endeavors to console himself. With you, madame, in America, it is quite another thing, I know. It is marriage first, reflection afterward; then misery; then divorce. Believe me, madame, it is this fatal habit among your fellow-countrymen of rushing into matrimony without money which has made your courts so

overflowing with these *causes célèbres.*"

The duke, in his excitement, had risen and crossed the room. He drew his handkerchief across his brow and whisked it into his breast pocket.

"Now, madame, I am the most frank man you could imagine. Four weeks ago I say to myself, 'Louis, my dear fellow, how are you to marry the young girl you adore? You have no fortune save a few thousand francs a year, enough to supply your barest wants; you have no profession save that of arms'—as you know, madame, I hold a captain's commission in the Regiment of the Royal Guards of St. Petersburg —'you are, alas! not too lucky with the cards; your tastes are expensive. Pauline has no private fortune whatever.' "

"Pauline has her art," interrupted Mrs. Ackerman, still adhering to her

proclivities of holding on to a hair, so long as it would not snap. "Reeb says she will one day electrify the world and see it at her feet."

"Yes, madame," returned his grace deferentially, yet with a sigh, "but who can tell if mademoiselle will be the success—or the failure? To return, if you will permit me? At the crisis I said to myself, 'Hold! I recollect that when Reeb presented me to mademoiselle she said that mademoiselle was an heiress. To what? That must be discovered.' I soon found that my adored Pauline knew nothing whatever of this fortune. I said to myself, 'This young girl has no father; her mother is absent; it remains for you to act the part of father and suitor at once. I did so. I took into my service one of the cleverest detectives in Paris. I sent him to Langue-

doc, to Brimont-Aujillac, Brimont-Taube, Taube-sur-Mer."

Pauline's hand at this juncture grasped the edge of the heavy table for support; as the word "detective" passed the lips of her lover her fine lips curled, but at the same time she did not forget the news he had imparted; she did not forget that she stood there in the shadow of that horrid, shabby little old hôtel, heiress to fifty millions of francs.

"He looked up old deeds, registers of births, marriages, deaths, wills," resumed the duke. "He returned to Paris and reassured himself with research here also; he went across to England and brought back copies of the records of your husband's noble family there. The result was, madame, the indisputable fact that mademoiselle,

your daughter, is the sole heiress to the Brimont estates, to the fortune of de la Coutrée; she is the sole surviving scion of the noble family of de la Coutrée; the family of Brimont is extinct in all branches, either direct, collateral or left-handed. The marquise is in her eighty-second year. She is the last to bear the name."

Pauline's eyes flashed; she removed her hand from the table. She felt strong enough now to stand quite alone and look down with a smile upon the whole round world. She will be "madame la duchesse" and will have millions to support the position; she will return to New York, and those girls who ignored her in her flimsy frocks at school, who were married to mere tradesmen, shall behold how splendid

and how gracious this young duchess can be!

Well, the duke now paused, it seemed, from a certain inexplicable embarrassment, for he looked down and nervously stroked his small dark moustache and imperial.

Mrs. Ackerman, determined not to be in any way overcome by these surprising and, as she very well knew, trustworthy announcements, gave a careless fleck to her cashmere skirt and leaning back in the uncomfortable haircloth, said:

"Well, my dear duke, and how am I to be assured, especially considering the pains you have been at"—with an equivocal smile—"that you will prove adequate to the task and responsibility of attending to Pauline's interests, when, of course, she comes into her

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inheritance?" Here Mrs. Ackerman could not refrain from a lofty sway of her head.

"Alas, madame"—Louis de Monplaisir now leaned his back against the broad window-seat and surveyed the mother of Pauline with brooding and yet calculating eyes—"alas, madame," he repeated—"altho all that I have told you is true, and I am in possession of the documents to prove it, still, madame, it is necessary for me to tell you that——"

As he paused Mrs. Ackerman sat up straight, and her daughter started toward the door between the rooms.

"Go on!" ejaculated the mother tensely.

"—that Mademoiselle Pauline will never inherit a sou of this great fortune."

The door opened and the young girl stood there on the sill.

"Why not?" she asked, in a curious low tone—so curious and unwonted that neither of the others thinks of such things as conventionalities, and the man answered at once:

"Because, mademoiselle, both these ladies, the marquise and her sister, have made their wills in favor of another."

The duke now stepped toward his fiancée and attempted to raise her hand to his lips, but in a manner that betrayed no compunctions of romance she waved him away.

"Would it not be possible to break these wills?" she asked.

"No, mademoiselle, utterly impossible," replied his grace. "It is because it is so impossible, because, madame

and mademoiselle, I see no future before us, no prospect of marriage, that I have, I am aware, presented to you, my beloved Pauline, so distrait a manner for these past three weeks."

"Ah, yes, I suppose so," returned the girl absently.

Neither of the three people spoke now for a few moments. The duke, of course, had his plans; the mother was nonplussed, and that hour had arrived for her which generally arrives somewhat earlier in the lives of American mothers—the hour when, as a direct result of their own educational methods, they find themselves looking instinctively to their daughters for the solution and conduct of the crises which they themselves should be the ones to direct.

When the eyes of Mrs. Ackerman

finally sought Pauline's in helpless inquiry the answer was ready.

"Who is the person to whom my great-grandaunts have willed away—my inheritance?" she asked, clasping her hands behind her, but not moving from the doorway.

"A man," replied the duke, regarding her with an access of admiration, for her pose was that beautiful one of transition—the expectant, exquisite, almost indefinable instant of life when the girl becomes the woman.

"What is his name?"

"He is called indifferently the Duke d'Orléans, Philippe the Eighth and Louis the Nineteenth," was the response, tinged with such a contemptuous deflection as might be expected from this man when mentioning the one in question. "In Brimont, and through-

out the entire estate of the marquise, the people are loyal to the House of Bourbon, and they look for the coming of one whom they call their king any day," continued the duke, since neither of his companions said anything.

"How extraordinary!" finally vouchsafed Mrs. Ackerman, in a dazed fashion, still looking at her daughter.

"Yes, madame, that is a fact," responded his grace. "Those two venerable ladies, incredible as it may appear, although they have never beheld this young man, or seen his portrait—for, madame, to you it will be incredible, but Brimont is as far removed from modern methods as the Arctic region—these ladies watch each day"—at this instant the duke watched Pauline, whose brilliant eyes were intently fixed

upon his face as he concluded—"each day of the year for the arrival of their worshiped sovereign, whom they have unitedly made their heir."

The glances of the duke and his fiancée now met in one of those spiritual exchanges of thought for which we have not yet coined any adequate descriptive.

We can only say that it is in this special connection very wonderful how speedily an affiliation can take place between the apparent antipodes of subtle Latinism and American shrewdness; and, by the coalescence rendering desired results well-nigh positive. For a minute only Pauline hesitated; the tick of the small clock on the mantel was heard by each of these three people, as they hearkened for a something else, which it remained to be seen which one

of them would mention. In that minute Pauline Ackerman put away from her the sublime and beautiful hope of every woman's heart—the hope for a great, sublime and unselfish love. She said within herself that since Providence had not given her this priceless gift, then Providence must take the consequences.

So the young girl spoke first.

"Why not have him arrive?" Her smile was fine and bitter and did not beautify her features.

Her mother stared at her in unfeigned astonishment. Her lover sprang to her side and seized both her hands.

"Aha!" he cried joyfully, yet a trifle under his breath, as if not quite sure of his assumption.

"You comprehend, Pauline? You comprehend?"

She slowly nodded her head, leaving her chilly little hands in the grasp of the duke's firm warm fingers.

"I have seen pictures of the Bourbon prince," she said slowly, at the same time critically surveying the man before her. "You are not extremely unlike them—enough like for the purpose of enacting his rôle for the benefit of the marquise, my great-grandaunt."

Then Pauline laughed, and de Monplaisir covered her hands with kisses, and tears of joy suffused his eyes for a second or two.

He knew that Pauline had grasped his scheme with the most exquisite alacrity, and that she would adjust herself perfectly to its intricacies; so it is

that others beside the immortals recognize each other instinctively.

Mrs. Ackerman, twenty years her daughter's senior, felt bound in consequence, also constrained by the gravities of this situation—it being far in advance of even the most impalpable of her late husband's land schemes—to rise, lift her hands in the air, shake her head and cry out:

"Pauline, you are surely beside yourself! I cannot countenance anything so preposterous! I——"

"Pshaw, mother!" interrupted the girl, loosening her hands from the duke's, advancing into the room and sitting down at the table where paper, ink and pens are lying.

The two words were nothing in themselves; but the intonation completely dismissed Pauline Ackerman's past,

and her mother thoroughly understood that henceforth the young girl would take the lead. She at once proceeded to do so. Turning to de Monplaisir she leaned her elbows on the table, her chin in her palms, and said:

"Well, monsieur, what do you propose? What is your plan?"

"I am in your hands," replied the duke, who was quite clever enough to know a good thing when he saw it. He had all a true Frenchman's respect for and confidence in a bright woman, preferring what he termed the "supreme instinct of femininity" to the more robust and, he considered, less likely masculine program.

"We must work together," she said, shrugging her shoulders.

"Oh, assuredly! But, Pauline, you are more imaginative, also more execu-

tive than I. Where I should blunder you would conciliate; to you I look, my well beloved, for the initiative in our struggle to obtain your rights."

At this point the mother, who had not quite accepted the third person as an integral part of her soul, and who still felt clinging to her the fact that the duke was an outsider, said quickly:

"We must first be sure, my dear child, that this great fortune is your right. We must first find out if the marquise had not a perfect right on her side to bequeath her property to whomever she pleases. We must do nothing in haste."

"But we must!"

"Ah, madame, but we must!" exclaimed the duke and his fiancée in the same breath.

"Mother," Pauline added, taking up a pen and uncovering the ink, "this fortune is my right. I shall fight for it with all the weapons at my command. I cannot go out and hack my way to my estates with a sword, but with my wits I can, perhaps, win in the end. It is not right nor reason that this ridiculous old woman should leave what should be mine to a man whom she has never seen —to a pretender, to one who plots, I don't doubt, to overthrow the Republic, and who would use my millions to reinstate himself as king over France!"

"Precisely, madame!" The duke took a virtuous turn up the room; and Mrs. Ackerman's last stand for remonstrance tumbled into the waste-basket with all its predecessors.

"Precisely," repeated his grace. "This upstart young scion of a fallen

dynasty would immediately appropriate every franc of the fortune in his endeavor to reestablish the execrable House of Bourbon. Mademoiselle owes it to the people of France, as the future Duchesse de Monplaisir, to circumvent so impious a misuse." With which noble and suitable sentiment Louis Eugène Napoleon, Duc de Monplaisir, brought up at the side of his fiancée.

Pauline was writing but now stopped a bit, as she felt her suitor's hand on the back of her chair.

"I am writing," she said, "to my great-grandaunt, the marquise. That is the first step; it will only cost fifteen centimes." Pauline laughed. "I shall say that you and I, mother, purpose going down into Languedoc, expressly to have the honor of seeing her and the other old party. Once we get there

things must, of course, in a measure shape themselves. It is possible that the old dame might take a fancy to me and shelve Louis the—what did you call him?"

"Louis the Nineteenth," replied the duke with a sneer, quickly adding, "Never, mademoiselle! Do not delude yourself. Loyalty of the most profound nature runs with the blood of de la Coutrée and that of de Brimont both. Even you, my Pauline, will cause no diversion from the devotion which has kept these women in self-imposed exile for nearly fifty years."

"All right!" exclaimed Miss Ackerman, writing a few more lines on her sheet.

"See here," she said presently, squaring round toward her fiancé, "if I go there, and lay the way smoothly for the

arrival of the king, are you entirely sure that you can play the part?"

The duke drew himself up with a suspicion of haughtiness and silently bowed to Miss Ackerman with the courtly grace of perhaps an emperor.

"Ah, I see," she remarked. "You can do it. And mother, even with her weak French, can soon bring the sisters into fine form. Trust her for making a success of the ingenuous prospective mother-in-law of the heir to the throne!"

"Adorable young girl!" cried the duke, who today enjoyed uttering all those pleasurable sensations, upon which he had meditated in secret ever since the return of the gentleman whom he had sent to Brimont a month before.

Given an inheritance of consummate finesse, splendid manners, imperial

tastes, liberal passions, no virtues worth mentioning and a lavish education in all the pleasures and philosophic experiments and excursions of which his mentality permitted, and it could hardly result otherwise than that this young man should greet the present situation with the keenest relish.

"Now, at last," said Pauline, laying down her pen, "I will read you my letter."

"HÔTEL PETIT ST. EUSTACHE, RUE LA ROSE BLANCHE, No. 11, PARIS.

"To Madame la Marquise de Brimont and to Mademoiselle de la Coutrée.

"MESDAMES: To you I am a stranger, but through my late revered father, John de la Coutrée-Ackerman, of the United States of America, I am your great-grandniece, and so I am told by my mother, the last of our honored line. My dear mother at last has consented to grant my request and take me

to the beautiful Languedoc country and show me the place where my ancestors dwelt, where beat those noble hearts forever devoted to the cause of king and country!"

Both the duke and Mrs. Ackerman now clapped their hands in perfect paroxysms of delight.

"What a mind!" cried the suitor.

"Pauline, you'll do!" exclaimed the mother.

"You see," explained the girl, "it's best to disarm them from the start. Now, listen to the rest:

"Pray, venerated relations, do not allow our coming to disturb the routine of your pious lives—

"I suppose they are pious?" she said jocularly.

"Oh, by all means—a chaplain resident, and mass sung every day in the year," answered the duke.

"—pious lives. My dear mother and I will stop at the inn, and as we will take our wheels with us we can ride to the château and call upon you at any hour you will name. We shall leave Paris on the sixteenth of the month, about. Dear and revered relations, I kiss your hands and beg to be forgiven my presumption in saying that I am waiting to see you with unparalleled impatience, and that I am ever your devoted and affectionate great-grandniece,

"PAULINE DE LA COUTRÉE-ACKERMAN.

"My mother presents her most respectful and affectionate greetings and emulates my impatience to behold the relatives of her adored husband."

"It is perfection!" exclaimed the duke.

"Sounds just like a letter from a nice little innocent convent-bred girl, now, doesn't it?" laughed Pauline.

"It certainly does," confirmed the

mother; adding thoughtfully, "isn't it just a little too brief, eh?"

Miss Ackerman shook her head.

"It says all I intend to say at present," she remarked, "and a lot more words might confuse them; besides, my French composition isn't any too good. No, that letter is all right."

It was. Pauline had not been adding five dollars a week to her meagre supply of pocket money, by writing "letters from Paris" to a New York paper, without having learned the very exact science of calculating the kernel to a T and always sending it minus the shell.

She now addressed her envelope under the duke's superintendence as to its lengthy details, stamped it, and presently watched his grace drop it into the box at the corner of the street.

[IV]

IV.

THE Abbé de la Toinette had finished reading Pauline's letter to her great-grandaunts, and to the attendant Clémentine.

For fully a minute all four stood perfectly motionless, and then the abbé respectfully drew back and took a large pinch of snuff.

The marquise peered at the missive, which she held off from her in a species of continued and questioning dismay.

"The Americans!" she exclaimed, breaking the spell of the silence, with a tone that might have fittingly been employed toward cannibals.

"Not from the king!" said mademoiselle ruefully and with a sigh.

"For the fortune of mesdames," remarked the abbé succinctly, taking more snuff and withdrawing toward the warmth of the chimney-side.

"Never!" cried the marquise.

"Never!" echoed mademoiselle.

"If what the lady says in her letter is true she is the legal heir to the estates," said the abbé.

"And do not my will, the will of Marie Sylvie, my sister, stand, notwithstanding a hundred legal heirs?" asked the marquise, now trembling with excitement.

"Assuredly," answered the abbé; "but I would only say that the visit of these ladies portends a knowledge on their part of the facts of their relationship and claims."

"*That* for their claims!" cried the marquise, tearing Pauline's letter in

two. "Shall we not do as we choose with our own? Because my brother Albert Léonce Lionel de la Coutrée was such a fool as to leave France and emigrate to some God-forsaken place across the sea, there to marry, have a daughter, who also marries, has a son, who is, one may suppose, the father of this most insolent young person—must we then forget our vows, our Sovereign, our principles of loyalty, our centuries of devotion to the great House of Bourbon? Speak, Monsieur l'Abbé, speak and tell us that!"

"Mesdames," replied the old man, spreading his lean hands to the blaze behind him, "it is to be remembered that these Americans probably know nothing about the House of Bourbon; that for them, in their aboriginal wildness, their doubtless untamed and al-

most savage simplicity, the grand sentiments of loyalty, fidelity, royal divinity, are absolutely unknown."

"Ah!" The marquise nodded comprehendingly.

"Ah-h-h!" Mademoiselle nodded in like manner.

"I have heard, when I was in Rome," continued the abbé, "that civilization in those remote countries is mainly comprised in the thirst for gold, for riches at any price."

And "ah-h!" and "ah!" repeated the ladies, with increasing intelligence.

"Then it will be at once the best plan for you, Monsieur l'Abbé, to write to them a statement of facts; that the fortunes of both mademoiselle and myself are irrevocably left to his sacred majesty, Louis the Nineteenth, and——"

"And, pardon, mesdames," inter-

rupted the priest; "one must not forget that the usurping government of a vile republic still holds the reins in our unhappy France. Caution, caution! It would be more discreet not to name the beneficiary under the wills."

Both the sisters bowed a grateful and admiring assent to so much of worldly wisdom.

"It is to be believed beyond a doubt," added the old man, "that when these American ladies receive the news of the disposition of the property of mesdames they will reconsider the affair of a visit to Languedoc."

"Ah, the good, the wise, the excellent la Toinette!" cried the marquise. "What would become of us, Marie Sylvie, without his counsels? So, with the polite letter that he will write to-night he will destroy for us the terrors

of an acquaintance with these descendants of our absurd brother; he will put the death-blow to the avaricious hopes of these Americans."

But with all the courtly, gracious, and positively outspoken terms of his epistle, the desired end was not gained by its composition and sending to the Hôtel Petit St. Eustache. By no means. By return mail there arrived another letter to the marquise from her affectionate great-grandniece, written apparently more in sorrow than in anger, and professing a simple and natural wish to know her late father's relatives, and avowing such a horror and contempt of the implication put upon her first missive as now rent the souls, not only of the marquise and mademoiselle, but of the politic old churchman as well.

"You see," cried the marquise, as she listened to Pauline's second quotation, "these Americans! they cannot all be as savage as represented. They still wish to see us, altho they know that the fortunes are impossible for them. They must come—speak, Monsieur l'Abbé—not to the inn, but to the Château Brimont? It must never be credited that the descendants of one even so wilful and democratic as our late brother Albert Léonce Lionel were lodged anywhere but beneath the roof of his sisters."

The abbè and Marie Sylvie both endorsed this decision; and a second letter was mailed to the Hôtel Petit St. Eustache, bidding Pauline and her mother welcome to the château.

Yet Miss Ackerman, who, despite her lack of many years, had nevertheless

acquired a very distinct appreciation of the wisdom of coldness, decided that they would stop first at the inn at Brimont-Aujillac, and thence would ride the three miles to the château on the afternoon of their arrival.

Accordingly, after breakfast at one o'clock, both Mrs. and Miss Ackerman came out into the courtyard of the Lion d'Or, and, much to the astonishment of the innkeeper and his wife, the maid and the hostler, mounted those two singular-looking machines—from which, oh, every saint! these ladies must presently fall to their death! But no, away they glide like ducks upon the deepest water; skimming the narrow road as the wind does, and, heaven be thanked, no broken bones so far as they could be seen.

They had inquired the shortest way to the château, which, proving to be a mere lane, trodden down compactly by the cows and sheep, gave them no other prospect than the lovely level fields in their varying shades of green, the soft blue of the sky, the shadow of oaks, the tinkle-tankle of the little Taube River, where the fleurs-de-lys were already beginning to flaunt their royal tinge, in stalks full of buds, all up and down the stream.

"They had never seen a bicycle before, mother, only think!" cried Pauline.

"It seems absurd," returned the older woman, as the two glide on, single file, in the sweet warmth of the day.

"Pauline," added the mother, "those must be the towers of the château. Are you nervous?"

Miss Ackerman threw a glance of amused and scornful defiance over her shoulder, for of course the daughter, being of her nationality, was in the lead.

"Do I look so?"

Indeed she did not. In a quite correct costume of dark gray, altho the inevitable pin was not absent, even today, doing its duty between divorced waist and skirt; with the bloom of youth, health, anticipation, and ambition on her pretty, round cheeks, Pauline presented anything but a nervous appearance.

But before her mother could reply to her query both women gave utterance to a decidedly nervous scream and nearly came to grief in the road, for at the bend there reared a fat donkey, whose saddlebags were bursting with live fowls, these cackling with all their

might, while the late rider, a plump monk, knelt in the dust, crossing himself and shivering with terror. As Pauline and her mother whirled past him his moans were piteous, and the braying of the donkey and the wailing of the corded hens something appalling.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Mrs. Ackerman, "this certainly is Arcadia. I suppose the creature has never seen a wheel before in his life. Come, Pauline, let's take a spurt and get up our courage—and our color, before we enter your domains."

The promoter's widow suited action to word and went scudding off like the wind. The daughter slackened her speed, had a mind to turn back, and offer some assistance to the old priest; thus her mind intent on this bit of good will, she did turn her head just as she was

about to cross a little bridge over the dawdling Taube—a little innocent stone bridge spanning the blue, lazy water and throwing its long afternoon shadow away into the deep thicket that bordered one side of the highway.

By turning her head, Miss Ackerman lost her balance, excellent rider tho she was, and would have come a very ugly cropper indeed on the stone abutment, had not a man who was evidently hunting, from his dress and rifle, made a swift dash and saved her therefrom by literally taking her into his arms.

The girl was so surprised and the thing so meteoric, and she withal so chagrined and mortified that the tears rushed to her eyes, as this very tall, very handsome, and very strong man set her on her feet in the road.

Off came his cap, and he made a profound bow.

"I ask ten thousand pardons, but it looked like concussion of the brain—at best, and I ——"

"Saved my life," sobbed Miss Ackerman. Then she braced up. "I suppose I must be grateful to you," she added, now looking him over and discovering that this was not a question of small or large change.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, I do thank you. I do," she added.

"There is no necessity," he remarked simply. "It," there is just a hint of hesitation in his manner—"gave me pleasure to serve you. In the future I hope I may be able to serve you again." He bowed low, and was gone into the thick woods before Pauline could speak again.

She regarded the place where he had stood and, she had a mind—now think of it! to bolt then and there and get back to the inn and to her old life in Paris as fast as she could. But certainly she did nothing quite so foolish. Instead she sped after her mama, and soon caught up.

"Oh, here you are at last," remarked the widow. "What in the world have you been doing back there?"

"I thought I'd give the old party an alms, for his church or something; I suppose he's one of my tenants likely!" Pauline laughed blithely enough. She saw no necessity for telling her mother of her mishap and her rescue, in fact she never cared to relate the incident and never did.

"Did you give it?" sharply.

"No, couldn't find him."

"Glad you couldn't! I wonder if the old aunties have ever seen a bicycle either?"

"Who cares whether they have or not," responded Miss Ackerman buoyantly. "If they object I'll break mine up before their eyes. Say, mother, am I O. K.? Are my violets straight? The French all adore violets, don't they?"

"Yes; are mine?"

"You're as fit as a ten-franc glove. Now," added the young woman, "here we are."

They passed the open gates into the park of the Château de Brimont and proceeded up the beautiful driveway, through the magnificent gardens, in and out where the terraces ran at either side, where fountains played and where the sun shone like gold over their coming.

"And this"—the young girl rose in her saddle, and the red, splendid blood rushed over her face as she took in the vast prospect spread before her eyes, took in the superb castle, feudal in its size and bearings—"this, then, is my inheritance!"

"Hush!" exclaimed the mother. "They're on the terrace. Look between those shrubs, and you can see two old ladies and an old man; I should say, a priest."

Yes, mesdames and the abbé were on the terrace. They beheld the advent of the two strangers, and piously crossed themselves. The marquise and her sister fled into the house. They had never either seen or heard of a bicycle, nor yet had their confessor, who hobbled off to his oratory.

From the vantage ground of the salon,

behind the window curtains, they said to each other solemnly:

"The end of the world is indeed near! Oh, the shamelessness, the iniquity, the impious disrespect! Skirts midway of the—let us not mention the word even, for toward the good God and all his saints one must be polite! And hold! violets! violets! And these are the Americans! Where is Clémentine? Give her the small brass firetongs. Send her out with the respectful compliments of madame la marquise, and let her, with courtesy, but with firmness, pluck the abominable flowers from the bodices of the relatives of our late brother, Albert Léonce Lionel, and inform them that at the Château de Brimont the emblem of the Corsican must burn and cannot bloom. And let our excellent Clémentine bring from our

armoires two silk skirts, and let her assist at the decent toilet of these ladies, making them presentable in the eyes of the world. Let her send refreshments to them in the boudoir, after the toilet is complete. Let her order Jacques or Jules—if they will touch them!—to hide away those monstrosities of the devil upon which those ladies arrived. Let Monsieur l'Abbé emerge from his modest retirement and greet them and escort them into the presence of madame la marquise and mademoiselle!"

All of which was done with great politeness by Clémentine, Jacques, Jules—trembling and in terror, with prayers—and the abbé.

It may be supposed that Mrs. and Miss Ackerman were both mystified with these proceedings, and that it was very fortunate for all those concerned

that English was an unknown quantity for the majority.

When the boutonnières were nimbly wrested from them by means of the fire-tongs and when the gorgeous white silk skirts, flowered respectively in red and green, were cast deftly over their bicycle garb, Pauline, divided between laughter and anger, cried out:

"What do you suppose this means, mother?"

"I'm sure I don't know! Are you going to submit to such ridiculous incivility? My goodness gracious alive! I'm a sight to behold in this full skirt!"

"Am I going to submit?" laughed Pauline, surveying herself in the mirror, while Clémentine held a hand-glass before her and dashed Cologne water over her hands. "I like that!

I'm going to submit to anything on earth, and so are you, dear, to gain my ends. Ah! isn't this a foretaste of the future? For behold, for the first time in her life Pauline de la Coutrée-Ackerman has the services of a lady's-maid. Who cares what the dear old frumps' ideas are, so long as the day comes when I shall reign here!"

And Miss Ackerman thanked Clémentine in such a pretty way as quite won over the aged woman's heart.

When at last, thus strangely arrayed, the mother and daughter were solemnly conducted by the abbé down into the grand salon they beheld the marquise and mademoiselle both standing at the far end of the room. A series of profound courtesies followed, performed, it must be said, with equal grace on both sides, while the

abbé duly announced the visitors by name.

The marquise for a moment surveyed her guests and the juncture promised to be a trifle uncomfortable, as might be expected when, with remote ideas, if any, of each other, a half a century ago looks into the eyes of today.

Of course it was the young girl who took the initiative. With a little run —much admired and duly instilled by Reeb as indicative of the runaway sweet impulses of youth—Pauline covered the sixty feet of polished floor which separated her from her relations, made a beautiful courtesy on reaching them, seized the hand of the marquise in both of hers, kissed it respectfully, duplicated all of this for mademoiselle, and then cast her lovely eyes up to their

withered countenances, and her pouting lips received the answer they seemed so innocently to crave. Pauline in a trice was gathered to the hearts of her great-grandaunts; youth, beauty and ruse had their usual innings, while the mother looked on with sympathetic smiles and nods.

With the most delightful ingenuousness Pauline contrived to apologize for the short skirts, the awful bicycles, the atrocious violets, not quite comprehending why she should, but attaining the object of making the old ladies believe that adverse circumstances alone had coerced their guests into all these unseemly things.

Then Mrs. Ackerman took from her satchel a packet of time-stained letters —those written at the dictation of the marquise and mademoiselle themselves

by this very same dear old Abbé de la Toinette—see! the signature!—to their exiled and disinherited brother, Albert Léonce Lionel, in Louisiana in the year 1840, and sacredly preserved by his descendants, proving that Pauline was indeed their brother's great-grandchild and no impostor.

The joy of these ladies as they beheld this young girl, who indeed resembled much the portrait of the marquise taken in her eighteenth year; their agitation as they insisted that their newly found relatives should come at once to the château and spend a month with them; the shy, proud reluctance of Pauline and her amiable mother; the final yielding to solicitation; the despatching of Jules at once for the luggage of mesdames to the inn; the showing them to the suite of

rooms already prepared for them; the ringing of the angelus bell on their way through the grand gallery; the pious falling upon her knees of their young great-grandniece—contriving, as she did so, to twitch her gasping mama's gown, and so pull her into line with her surroundings. The sweet simplicity of Pauline as she beheld the sumptuously furnished rooms, the glowing fire, the exquisite toilet-tables, the splendid mirrors, the Beauvais tapestries, the cloth-of-gold hangings; her naive and dutiful admiration of the carved *prie-dieu;* her reverential awe at the head of the stag which a king had killed—all this and much more one might have observed before the heavy oaken door closed, the heavy portière was drawn and the guests were alone together.

They exchanged glances and almost in one breath said,

"Heaven be praised! I thought they would never go!"

And Pauline added, throwing herself upon a lounge whose down quilt of blue satin billowed about her, and kicked off her boots and leggings:

"Mother, we are guests at the Château de Brimont."

Mrs. Ackerman, heated with the effort incident to getting out of the white and green brocaded skirt, heaved a sigh and nodded.

"You're your mother's own daughter," she said, now standing in the midst of the pool of silk.

"I'm myself," replied the younger woman, in a low, haughty tone.

Yet inheritance so impinges upon in-

dividuality that it is frequently difficult to determine where the one ends and the other begins. There was a fair slice of the land promoter's helpmeet in the composition of the slender beautiful young person who presently sat up at the desk which had once belonged to Queen Marie Antoinette, and wrote a brief account of her experiences, since seeing him, to the Duc de Monplaisir.

The closing paragraph of his fiancée's letter ran this way:

All thus goes well, as you see. It now remains for me to take the best way that presents itself to inform my excellent great-aunts of my engagement to one whom, perhaps, they will not approve; then to introduce him to them as their much desired Louis the Nineteenth! Figure to yourself their consternation, surprise, joy; at least so I hope, for, to

be frank, the name of his majesty, altho I carefully led up to it, was received by them in total silence. Still, we will suppose that their delight will be as great as your man has caused you to believe. Next, they will bid you come to the château; you will set out. Well, one can't say it will fall out just so and so, but I pledge you a kiss, Louis, that in less than a fortnight you will receive word to pack up your royal garments and come to Languedoc! Write me at the inn; it can be brought over by one of the valets, or I myself will stop there for it. Four horses and a lot of handsome old-fashioned carriages have been placed at our disposal; also there are about forty servants for the château alone. Already, monsieur, I see the crown upon your brows! It is extraordinarily hard to set oneself back—as one would a clock, for example—for actually these people are exactly as you said you had been informed—in the last century entirely. Reeb had her uses, for had I not studied with her plays of that epoch I should be lost. As it is, it amuses me to act the rôle of an ingénue

of the reign of Louis the Eighteenth. *Au revoir,* Louis de Bourbon!

Always yours,

PAULINE.

And it is quite true, too, that day by day Pauline and her mother both enjoyed the, to them, novel existence of the Château de Brimont. Had it not possessed a definite aim, it is equally true that this life would have palled; but the fine exhilaration of the object, the increasing growth toward the climax, the subtle flavor of the plan which harbored behind the girl's lightest word or most apparently casual action, gave such an impetus and relish to her time as made her a thousand times more buoyant than she had ever been before. Success is superb, but it is a fact that the confident struggle for it possesses a diviner salt.

Then the luxurious style of the château—the troops of servants; the equipages; the occasional formal visits of the Comte de Frijac, the Prince d'Oxillac and their families; all these pictures of long ago, all as ignorant of the affairs of the world of the present as if it were still unborn; even the daily mass in the chapel and the visits to the convent were tolerated, because with them all came the delicious homage of grand manners which is very grateful indeed to most republican persons, and was especially so to the unaccustomed souls of Mrs. and Miss Ackerman.

What castles the girl built! What splendid jewels she set upon her handsome head! What troops of people who had regarded her disdainfully in the past she flouted with unprecedented splendors! What good deeds she did

to those who had been kind to her! What amateur theatricals she gave at Newport and New York for charity! What races on land and sea she won! What gowns and ermines and sables she bought! What scores of men wrote her down "the reigning beauty," as her coach tooled up the drive! And her lover—what of him?

There is a spade which, put into the hand of youth, digs love's grave, and the name of the spade is Ambition, and the day comes when youth, looking backward, curses the spade and clamors for love's resurrection; but this seldom comes.

Pauline Ackerman was wholly absorbed in the pursuit of her object, and if once in awhile the old sweet belief in love for love's own sake knocked at her heart, she stilled the beat with the in-

timate knowledge that de Monplaisir would not marry her unless she could in some way provide the wherewithal. There were other men in the world besides de Monplaisir? Yes, but Pauline and her mother were unanimous in thinking that a duke in the hand was worth any other man in the bush, especially a duke who had introduced them to the broad estates of de Brimont and de la Coutrée.

Pauline had been out for a drive. The marquise and mademoiselle seldom drove—the motion fatigued them; so the girl, as her mother remained with her hostesses, had been off by herself, and had stopped at the inn, where an urgent letter from her lover awaited her. She drove home quickly, at once went to her room, exchanged her blue gown for a simple white one, with no ribbons, no

jewels, just a spray of lily-of-the-valley, where the laces crossed at her throat. She took the duke's letter in her hand and stood surveying herself, for she heard her mother's footstep on the corridor, and wished to be assured that the marquise was alone before she went downstairs.

The marquise was not alone. As Mrs. Ackerman left, the abbé entered her boudoir.

"My daughter," he said, "I think it is now time for you to speak a little of our king; I counselled silence upon the subject until I should acquaint myself somewhat with the characters of these ladies. There is no danger. Where I thought that the violets might indicate a sympathy with the usurper I find it merely to have been accident. This pure young girl only yesterday said to

her estimable mother in my hearing as she gazed upon the portrait of his majesty, Louis the Seventeenth, of martyred memory, 'Look, mother; is not that the face of a royal boy? Has he not the air of a monarch—that beautiful young Bourbon! Ah, how I venerate such misfortunes!' You perceive, mesdames," continued the abbé, "that your new-found relations, although Americans and not to be regarded too seriously, still will be in sympathy with us all, and the fete of our blessed St. Louis may be appropriately kept, as is our custom, with prayers for his majesty, Louis the Nineteenth.

"God be praised!" cried both ladies in unison.

"I shall this day," added the marquise, "impart to my great-grandniece the loyalty of our house and the sacred

cause and name of him to whom we leave our patrimonies. Eh, Marie Sylvie?"

Mademoiselle bowed her head. She saw the long shadow of the little chevalier coming up the gardens ahead of the chevalier himself, and she slipped out the window and pattered up the path to meet him.

"If I am not grievously mistaken, mesdames," the abbé continued, quite ignoring Marie Sylvie's exit, "you will find in Mademoiselle Pauline a most perfect concord with your pious arrangements. I have made human nature the study of a long life, mesdames, and it is not at the age of eighty-three that I shall find myself mistaken. Ah, no!" And the abbé, who had only lately come in contact with the intricacies of what may be summed up

as modernity, walked out of the marquise's boudoir, taking snuff and much satisfaction in his own astuteness—just as Pauline walked in at the upper door.

"May I enter and bid you good morning, madame grandaunt?" asked the young girl, halting at the threshold and courtesying low; for Miss Ackerman, with the wonderful adaptiveness of her countrywomen, had long since absorbed the charming formalisms of intercourse which she found prevailing at the Château de Brimont.

"Certainly, my dear child," replied the marquise, "and very apropos, since I was just now wishing to see you; I have something to say to you of importance—great importance. Sit down, Pauline."

Pauline hesitated, as she drew the

high ottoman up beside the marquise.

"Madame grandaunt"—she half faltered, pressing the duke's letter tightly between her fingers—"will you allow me to say that I have something to tell you—something of the greatest importance to me; something for which I wish to ask your benediction, your approval, oh, my beloved grandaunt?" Miss Ackerman now cast herself, with the grace of Reeb herself, upon the stately ottoman and clasped her hands imploringly toward the marquise, while the least little hint of tears quivered in her voice.

"My child," cried the marquise, much moved, "I pray of you do not hesitate. Confide in me, and if your project merits it—as I am sure it must—my benediction shall be yours. What is it, then, my Pauline?"

"My betrothal," answered the girl, with downcast eyes and reddening cheeks.

"Ah-h!" exclaimed the old lady. "Here indeed we are in the midst of something very interesting. Marriage —that is a great step, my child, and doubtless your excellent mama has looked to it before this that the *parti* selected is a desirable one?"

"My mother has consented, but, madame grandaunt, you, as the head of our house, at least on my late father's side, are the one whose approval I seek. Oh, madame grandaunt, he is so noble, so handsome, so all that one can desire!"

"Hold!" smiled the older woman. "That is youth, that is enthusiasm, that is nature. Tell me, my child, who is your fiancé?"

Pauline now lowered her eyes again and swept the tail of her long gown pathetically around her feet. She sighed.

"Madame grandaunt, he is almost an exile; he is heavily in debt; he is regarded with scorn by those who should acknowledge him as their chief; he is proscribed, watched; he dare not display even the coat of arms of his house; he who should command in castles and palaces now resides in a shabby apartment in the rue Trouchet." Thus Miss Ackerman described, she fancied, quite fittingly, the social state of the Bourbon heir, and she was not too far afield.

"Ah?" responded the marquise. "But this is all very unfortunate, my dear Pauline, for since you have no fortune, what, then, will you and this pen-

niless young gentleman live upon?" The old marquise began to fear that after all the young American has but arrived at Brimont for the purpose of enlisting her substantial sympathies.

Miss Ackerman at once felt the situation and met it with the watchword incident to the supposed circumstances all the world over.

"On love!" she exclaimed, with shining eyes. "Love and hope and faith."

"Fine things," rejoined the old lady, "but shadowy. What is the name of this young man, Pauline?"

"His name is—Louis. He is known as the Duc de Monplaisir."

"Aha! a title I do not recognize. Doubtless invented by the Corsican," she added to herself, with a curling lip and a restive tap of her cane on the floor.

"Madame grandaunt, you disapprove? I feared that you would! Oh, I implore of you, do not keep back your benediction from me. Louis and I are going to America to make our fortunes, and I could not bear the thought of leaving France without your approval. Besides," she said falteringly, twisting de Monplaisir's letter in her hands, "he desires to know if he may come to Brimont to see me—to pay his respects to you and mademoiselle—he has heard much of you."

"From you, doubtless." The marquise rose and opened the velvet-lined drawer of one of the toilet-tables in the adjoining room. She took from it a beautiful necklace of corals and diamonds, not costly but well suited to a young person.

"Before he knew of me," Pauline answered.

The marquise clasped the necklace around her great-grandniece's neck and put a little pecking, bird-like kiss on her forehead, and said:

"Now, the good God bless you, my child. At this moment it is most fitting that I should communicate to you the reason why you can never inherit either the fortune of my sister or my own."

Pauline had knelt to receive the necklace and the blessing. She remained on her knees still, while the marquise placed a hand on either of her shoulders.

"And if you are a true descendant of the family of de la Coutrée, as I believe you to be, you will rejoice completely that the vow taken by my sister and myself, long years ago, cannot be violated.

That vow, Pauline, was that we should never leave our estates until the House of Bourbon once more reigned in our beloved France."

Miss Ackerman started, sprang to her feet, clasped her hands in mute and yet apparently incredulous ecstacy, while the marquise continued, her black eyes sparkling with fervor and loyalty:

"That to that Louis the Nineteenth, whom——"

Miss Ackerman now staggered backward—having calculated the *pas* and its cost some minutes since—and leaned, as Reeb would have rejoiced to see her favorite pupil, against the heavy armoire.

"Whom," continued the marquise, noting but by no means understanding the agitation of her young relative, "our sainted grandmama on her deathbed declared we should live to see come

to this poor Château de Brimont, as came his sacred ancestors, also kings of France. Louis the Nineteenth, Pauline—he is our heir."

Miss Ackerman gasped, almost choked, and darted toward the marquise, her eyes and cheeks aflame with the anxiety of one who watches the scales swing that hold all his future in their balance.

"Madame grandaunt, can I believe my senses? Oh, can it be true? You, too, and my grandaunt Marie Sylvie believe in, are loyal to, the House of Bourbon? You, too, execrate the Republic, disdain the House of Bonaparte? You, too, believe that the day will come when the flag of the fleur-de-lys will wave from every housetop? Oh, you render me the happiest

girl in the world! You will render my Louis the happiest man!"

"He is a royalist?" gasped the old woman feverishly.

"Royalist, royalist!" Pauline laughed wildly. "He, my lover! my fiancé! he himself is ——"

For a second the young girl wavered; the blurred standard of Truth fluttered in her face, only to be thrust aside, as not wanted here. She concluded:

"—is Bourbon d'Orléans! is himself Louis the Nineteenth. De Monplaisir is but the title by which he is sometimes known, and prefers to be. Since France denies him, why should he parade his name?" This was hurried out with tremendous dash and force.

The old marquise fell upon her knees and raised the cross which hung at her chatelaine to her wrinkled lips. For a

second there was a silence in that room, while the loyalest heart that ever beat in woman's breast throbbed out its unworded thanksgiving to the Throne of Grace, while the turbulent pulses of the American girl kept such madcap time as made the place swim before her starting eyes.

"My king! my king! He comes! he comes! My child, why did you not tell me this before? My benediction! my approval!" The marquise rose and laughed. "To think that one of my family is deemed worthy of the choice of his sacred majesty! Almost an exile, you say? Write! The abbé shall write also. Bid him Godspeed to Brimont. Debts, you told me? Youth must indeed amuse itself a little; they shall be paid! Hold! give me that little string of beads from your throat; so, there! " replacing

the corals and brilliants in their drawer and taking out a magnificent parure of diamonds and rubies, "these are the fitting jewels for her who is to be the bride of France's sovereign, my dear!" The marquise took Pauline by the hand and drew her to her side, while she reached out the other arm and pulled the bell-rope.

When Clémentine appeared, "Summon monsieur l'abbé, Madame Ackerman, mademoiselle and monsieur le chevalier," she said. "Bid them to have the complaisance to come to me here without delay."

"Tremble not, my child," added Pauline's great-grandaunt, for the girl was shivering with her tangle of emotions. "Rejoice, for you bring happiness beyond comparison into the lives of us old people; into the lives of some

hundreds here in the domains belonging to my sister and myself."

It will doubtless be asked now if the marquise had no misgivings in accepting the revelation just made by her young relation. She had neither reluctance nor hesitation in her belief in all that she had heard. To her, who had never seen any portrait whatever of the Duc d'Orléans; had never read a line concerning him; who had no affiliation with any members of the royalist parties, in or out of France; who, for almost fifty years, had pinned her simple faith on the dictum of a moribund grandmother and on the legend of her family's loyalty to the Bourbons since the reign of the first king of that line, Pauline's announcement seemed most natural. It would never have occurred to the Dame chate-

laine of de Brimont or to anyone within her radius to have questioned the identity of her great-grandniece's suitor, or to have done other than joyfully prepare to greet the young, and as yet landless, heir to a fallen throne.

To him who has waited for his ideal as long as these people had, its apparent realization admits of no scepticism. In the same manner the marquise, mademoiselle and the abbé himself took the pious devotions of the Ackermans as a matter of course; it never entered into their minds to investigate their sincerity. None of them had ever encountered a Protestant in their lives; yet the fact remained that Pauline and her mother were Baptists in name, and that a serious consultation only had resulted in the decision to join in the Roman services without preliminary parley,

lest such might prove inimical to their scheme.

Clémentine threw open the double doors and held aside the portières; mademoiselle, the chevalier and the abbé entered, some wonder written upon their aged countenances as they beheld the marquise standing in the middle of the room, Pauline at her side, with her hands quite full of strings and coronets, brooches and aigrettes of sparkling gems.

"My beloved friends," the marquise began, and then stopped short, for Mrs. Ackerman hurried into the room in an excited way. She had, on receiving the summons, quaked with terror lest something had gone amiss, for her daughter had not taken her into her confidence regarding her latest move.

One glance reassured the promoter's facile widow; and, remembering the beautifier of the rue de la Paix, she collected her face and joined the group.

"My beloved friends," resumed the old marquise, " I have to tell you great, glorious, magnificent news. In this young girl, our beloved grandniece, Pauline de la Coutrée-Ackerman, you see the one who has been chosen as his bride by the heir of the House of Bourbon! Yes, my sister, the King of France seeks an alliance with our poor but ever faithful house! Our blood will give to our country yet another dauphin! My friends, listen! the coming of Louis the Nineteenth is at hand! "

The sweet, pitiful eyes of Marie Sylvie are now lowered to meet the tender and triumphant looks of the chevalier; their hands, quite wrinkled, with blue

veins knotting all the white, both encounter and clasp together amid the stiff folds of mademoiselle's pelisse. The abbé raised his hands in mute thanksgiving; the American lady took refuge in the modest contemplation of the floor.

"Oh, my beloved friends," continued the marquise, leaning one hand upon Pauline's shoulder, the other heavily on her ebony cane, "our king comes to Brimont, our king! our king! Grandma was right! Let us at once go to the chapel, monsieur l'abbé, and offer up our thanks to the abundantly good God."

On the way the little chevalier and mademoiselle lingered in the narrow passage built in the great wall, where the portraits of the Bourbons hung in the shadows; and the little chevalier

drew down Marie Sylvie's head to his shoulder and for the first time in six and forty years his lips were laid tremblingly, reverentially on those of his sweetheart.

All together, the marquise, mademoiselle, Mrs. Ackerman, Pauline, the chevalier and the abbé knelt before the altar in the chapel; and, contradictory as it may seem, the *Jubilate* which sang in the hearts of the Americans was precisely as earnest as that which echoed up to heaven from the guileless souls of the French.

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V

NOW all was preparation at the château, at Brimont-Aujillac, Brimont-Taube, Taube-sur-Mer. That this preparation was in a sense subdued, is true, but so very slightly lower in its pitch than it would have been in Paris, for instance, had a republican hero been the object of it, as renders it well nigh incredible. The only word of warning which was given out was a respectful request from the mayor of Brimont-Aujillac that, "out of regard for the— unfortunately! — prevailing government, madame la marquise would have the condescending grace to forbid the bands of music from playing on the occasion of the celebration of the coming

to Languedoc of the well beloved, the heir to the—alas!—now empty throne of France; as such had been prohibited by the said prevailing government in the city of Marseilles and a departure from the obnoxious decree might cause serious trouble, by calling attention to the loyalty of the good people of the province."

But, altho the absence of the music was held to be a great loss, even it was soon forgotten in the plans of the marquise and her retainers, pensioners, farmers and the rest.

At the château the royal suite, as it had always been called since his majesty, Louis the Thirteenth of blessed memory, had occupied it, when he made his journey into Languedoc in the year 1641, was thrown open, aired, swept and garnished for the coming of this, his

descendant. The grand Gobelins tapestries were brushed, shaken and rehung upon the walls, where, when his majesty should lie down at night for his repose, his eyes might rest upon the edifying history of the Golden Fleece; the gorgeous damask curtains, all embroidered with the royal fleur-de-lys, were drawn aside from the carved and gilded bedstead, displaying the pillows beautifully dressed with the priceless lace from Brussels; the sheets marked with the royal arms were taken from the lavender; the coverlet, emblazoned with the same device; the porcelain, decorated in similar fashion—all these were brought out and placed in readiness for his majesty.

At Brimont-Aujillac the young girls and boys from the silk mills were being drilled each evening by the good sisters

at the convent in the singing of a royal ode composed by the Abbé de la Toinette himself. At Brimont-Taube the good wives and good men and their sons and daughters were scouring their houses, their best clothes, polishing their silver buttons, beads and earrings, teaching one another how one should salute a king. At Taube-sur-Mer the fishwives and their men and children were hurrying at the skinning and the oil-pots and nets and casting quick glances at the sea and sky, praying to St. Martin for good weather, and being a little vexed that, after all their watching and waiting for his sail, the young king was, it seems, to come by land.

This regret the marquise herself fully shared.

"Grandmama said, 'Look ever to-

ward the sea and you shall behold the white flag flying.' I regret, Marie Sylvie, that his majesty finds it necessary to come by the land. Grandmama, I dare say, tho, did not see every detail quite correctly."

"Oh," answered Marie Sylvie, "is it not enough, then, my sister, that the king comes? Let us not be too particular whether it be ship or coach that brings him; doubtless the good God had the privilege of changing his mind."

"True," replied the marquise with a glance at mademoiselle, who of late seemed to be tasting with little furtive sips at the delicious cup of a youth which had been retarded, but never quenched, in all these many years.

Mademoiselle, in fact, used more rouge and powder, was more coquettish in her toilets, kept monsieur le cheva-

lier waiting for her in the salon far longer and made much more beautiful eyes for him than she had ever done before; and it was all, of course, because monsieur le chevalier was now occupied, daily, hourly, in urging his suit; in imploring mademoiselle to name the time when she would become his wife: which goes to show that youth does not preempt all the deliriums and delights of love, but that these sometimes laugh with deepest joy on lips no longer red.

Pauline Ackerman lived these days and weeks in a whirl, from which she allowed herself no period of rest, no time to think; her veins were on fire with the fever of impatience and the terror lest something unforeseen, unimaginable, yet should arise to thwart her desire; but the weeks went away to join

the rest of their kind and nothing untoward occurred.

It was now August, and very soon the duke would be with her. Within seven days the most important act in the drama which Miss Ackerman had so far successfully conducted would be set in motion by the arrival of her suitor.

Today she sat upon the floor in the suite which was known as "the Dauphin's"; for immediately after the announcement of her engagement had been made the young girl who was destined to wed a king was assigned a separate and far more magnificent suite of apartments than those she had shared with her mother; two maids and a valet had at once been appointed for her particular service; four of the finest horses, a groom, a coachman and footman had been placed at her exclusive disposal.

All the few families of distinction in the neighborhood had been duly presented to her. In short, Miss Ackerman's cup might be reasonably supposed to be overflowing with honey and oil; but for all this she sat with knitted brows upon the floor in her favorite lounging attitude, the buttons missing from her peignoir, and its open front displaying the rare, long beauty of her throat. She had dismissed her maids. To a woman in Pauline's position maids, even those who understood not the other language, are unsafe adjuncts. Mrs. Ackerman lay on a couch with the novel in her hand which she had brought with her from Paris two months ago.

"Mother," Pauline spoke in English, as she always did when these matters were under discussion between them, and she stuck the handle of her pen in

her mouth as she looked speculatively over at her parent.

Mrs. Ackerman gladly threw aside the novel; she had read it through four times, since there were no books at the château save those of religion. She looked at her daughter interrogatively.

"Suppose, after all," said Pauline, "that when Louis gets here, either he is unable to convince the old lady that she must identify and name him in the wills as Louis, Duc de Monplaisir, or that someone, something, should turn up to floor us—eh? What then?"

"Pshaw!" retorted the mother. "Don't you worry over any such nonsensical idea as that! If I know anything at all about men and women, and I think I do"—Mrs. Ackerman spoke with a supercilious and reminiscent smile—"the duke will understand quite

well how to make the marquise and mademoiselle alter the texts of their wills before he has been here many days. Don't be a fool, my dear; don't be like your father now, I beg, and begin to have compunctions just as we are on the verge of consummating about the biggest deal we'll ever get a chance at in our lives."

"I haven't any compunctions," exclaimed the girl hastily. "I'll admit, though, that I have some fears."

"Banish them, then! Nothing, and no one, can turn up, as you call it. My heavens, child, the people are as safe as if we had all been translated back before the flood. They are three of the most perfect idiots; they have no more conception of the world of today than I have of how Noah's wife made her bonnet. And neither has anyone within a

hundred leagues of them. Just remember that these old parties have immured themselves here for half a century; sitting up day and night waiting and watching for 'the king to come'." Mrs. Ackerman nearly choked between laughing and lying down; "and now when we have been good enough to show up with the royal article, you indeed must begin to quake—your father over again. Brace up; look ahead to your fifty millions of francs and all these splendid acres of Brimont and de la Coutrée. Are you writing to the duke?"

"Yes," replied Pauline. "It's the last letter he'll have before he starts. I've been reading it over to see if I've told him everything—I think I have: that the marquise is to send the post-chaise with outriders for him to the inn

to meet the arrival of the diligence; that the mayor will meet him and welcome him; also Master Tonton, the notary; Master Carolac, the bailiff; Père Mengoult, et cetera, et cetera; that at the cross the marquise and mademoiselle will await his coming; that he must be careful and keep well in mind all the etiquette of such an occasion; that he must not wear violets nor mention the name of Buonaparte; that he must conform to all the observances of religion; be haughty and yet complaisant. Oh, goodness me! he must certainly know how to meet the situation and use it to the best possible advantage. If he doesn't—well, then, I'll step in and repair the damage, that's all." Pauline paused, drew up her knees between her clasped hands and gazed straight ahead of her.

"Mother," she said at last, "you said something or other, a minute ago, about my being like father, didn't you?"

Mrs. Ackerman nodded; she was eating nut-cakes and sipping Bordeaux.

"Sometimes, lately, I have wished that I were like him."

"How?" gasped the mother, setting down her glass.

"Dead," returned the girl drily.

Then she rose, kicked her long draperies from under her feet and laughed.

"Don't be frightened, dear," she said glibly, "I am not dying just now. I'm alive and bound to succeed in my undertaking."

Mrs. Ackerman reached over and up, and kissed her child.

The great day, the greatest day that the countryside had known, since His

Majesty Louis The 13th came two hundred and fifty odd years ago, now dawned for this little corner of Languedoc.

The state coach, all small panelled paintings and gilt moldings, with six white horses, each ridden by a postillion in the blue livery of the marquise, had been despatched to meet his majesty at Brimont-Aurillac; a great arch of timbers and boughs, draped with Indian fabrics, had been erected at the cross roads at the edge of the forest of la Coutrée, the marquise herself with mademoiselle, had set forth in the blue chariot with four black horses, while Monsieur l'Abbé and the Chevalier followed in another; and twelve valets, six bearing old-fashioned arquebusses, six having the old-time hunting horns about their bodies over

one shoulder, under the other, rode on prancing steeds after these, who were presently joined *en route* by the equipages, outriders, retainers and valets of Messieurs the Comte de Frijac, the Prince d'Oxillac, the Baron de St. Yvonnet, while the peasantry, and fishermen, the wood-choppers, the mill-people, the Sisters of Ste. Marguerite; the lay brothers of St. Vincent de Paul, children and women, and youths and maids, lined all the two leagues of way from Taube-sur-Mer to the huge stone cross of the Connétable de Bourbon which stood at the *carrefour* in the forest and which was to be the rendezvous for the welcome of Louis The 19th, by the families of de Brimont and de la Coutrée, as it had been on the occasion of the visit of his ancestor Louis The 13th.

By advice of that exquisite French etiquette, which, however superficial, still hedges a young girl about with something of divinity, it was planned, as a matter of course, that Pauline, with her mamma, should await the coming of her royal fiancé at the château rather than go forward to meet him publicly.

Imagine a morning in August when the sun shone brilliantly on the billowing sea, when the long curve and wind of the little River Taube as it fell between the ripening fields, was regally purple with the thick growth of the fleur-de-lys; when the shade of the green woods was grateful here in the great hunting forest of de la Coutrée; gigantic trees, lithe saplings, moss-covered boulders; silence save for the tread of the horses, the crunch of the wheels; all expectancy, eagerness, hush; the cav-

alcade reached the cross of the Connétable with its roughly carven inscription commemorating one of the greatest Chasses à Courres ever known.

Hark! the wind of a horn blown hither by the breeze; the answering "Hallali! li! li!" of the marquise's six valets; the shouts and enraptured cries of men, the tearful blessings of women; caps, aprons, 'kerchiefs waving in the air; bows, courtesies, and around the bend of the forest road dashed the state coach containing the Duke de Monplaisir!

The six horses were pulled up on their haunches by the postillions; Monsieur l'Abbé and Monsieur le Chevalier descended from their coach assisted each by a lacquey; they, in turn, assisted Madame la Marquise and mademoiselle to alight, and all four crossed the carre-

four in procession, the marquise leading, to the side of the coach of Louis The 19th, where, with a courtesy just precisely such as a de la Coutrée made to Louis The 13th, the marquise welcomed his sacred majesty to this loyal part of his domains.

De Monplaisir, not to be outdone in chivalrous courtesy, and, perfectly master of his situation, impetuously leaped from the coach, bowed with his hat in his one hand, the other on his heart; seized the hands of both the marquise and mademoiselle, kissed them with inimitable grace, expressed his profound emotion, including in this all the beholders by a courtly wave of the arm, and turn of the eyes; insisted upon the marquise entering his coach and being driven at his side to the château.

And then, the Comte, the Prince, the Baron, the Mayor, the Notary, the Bailiff, the Chevalier, the Abbé, and everybody else, including many young persons of the feminine order, who testify to the beauty of the king's eyes, set up a hurrah of acclaim, devotion, heartfelt welcome, and enthusiasm such as had echoed right royally the same for Louis The 13th long ago.

"Ah, the condescending graciousness of his majesty! the sublime affability! the humility! the self-abasement, of the handsome, graceful, beautiful young monarch! The touchingness of his glances as he accepted the fleur-de-lys from the hand of Madame la Marquise, and at once placed it in his buttonhole! the amiable lowliness of his demeanor as he took from Mademoiselle Jeanne Marie de Frijac the embossed ode to his

majesty, written by Monsieur l'Abbé, and instead of replacing it in its sandal-wood box put it in his left-hand breast pocket! The exalted manner in which he bowed right and left to all his people! his angelic demeanor when the one year's wife of Gironac, the joiner, audaciously held up her baby in the very door of the royal coach, as he smiled and laid his hand upon its head in benediction. Ah, what so beautiful as to behold such grandeur united to such simplicity!"

All this and much more, as the procession wound down through Brimont-Taube to Taube-sur-Mer, the marquise and the king conversing all the while of many pleasant things such as Pauline, the betrothal, the vow of Madame la Marquise and of mademoiselle, her sister; the debts of the king; the indisposi-

tion of the king to even listen to such a matter as the payment of his debts; the deplorable state of the country; his majesty's grief over the weakness of his cause; the assuredness of the marquise that the day was not distant when his majesty would mount his throne! the which her sainted grandmama had predicted,—at this interesting crisis, the state coach was just passing the tall column, on top of which stood the image of the Corsican.

In sympathy doubtless, with the feelings of the marquise, the king now swept his handkerchief across his face, and also, with an almost imperceptible motion, lifted his hat from his head, while his fine eyes rested upon the bronze statute of Napoleon Premier. Very likely this small attention was in-

tended for the fishwives; in any event it so passed.

Then, up from the sea, climbing the hill to the château, with the lilt of the horns making merry, with the white flags flying from the turrets; with Pauline in her pink gown to match the taffetas of her great-grandaunts; with Mrs. Ackerman in rose damask, both on the grand terrace to meet him, the supposed heir to the House of Bourbon-d'Orléans, with the dashing grace to be expected of him under the circumstances, handed the marquise from the coach, ran up the steps to Pauline, fell upon one knee; and, kissing her hand repeatedly, gave to her the fleur-de-lys from his buttonhole.

Ah, well! What more then can be desired? The king arrives, and soon France, unhappy—save this little happy

space of it—France will have a queen!

The cheers, the bravas and bravos now broke out afresh and refused to be quieted until, from the château, whither they had retired, the monarch and his betrothed obligingly emerged, and showed themselves on the upper balcony.

The royal estate, as the duke and Pauline presently discovered, had several drawbacks; it was next to impossible for these two to obtain a moment alone together: kings and intending queens did not, in the code of the marquise, run to tete-à-tetes. His majesty took his meals alone, served by the two pages who had been appointed to the office: one the son of the Comte de Frijac, the other of the Baron de St. Yvonnet; also by the abbé, who said grace for him, and by Jules, who religiously tasted

every dish before his majesty was allowed to partake of it. His *lever* was attended by the abbé, the pages, and four valets; also his *coucher*. In his walks and drives six armed valets and the two pages, all mounted, accompanied him; and the plea of poverty, which Pauline had advanced as the reason for her lover's not bringing a suite with him into Languedoc, certainly no longer embarrassed the Duke de Monplaisir.

With all the fine delicacy of which such characters are capable, the marquise contrived to fill the empty purse of her royal guest; and moreover, in a fortnight's time he had sent twenty-five thousand francs to Paris and paid all his gambling debts, except the one he owed to Reeb.

At last, however, after considerable manœuvreing, these two people ar-

ranged a half hour together, by the aid of Mrs. Ackerman.

They were on the terrace in full view, it is true, of the windows of the salon and of the boudoir; but in the one room were the chevalier and Marie Sylvie, while in the other Pauline's mother held the marquise in conversational leash.

"Well?" ejaculated the girl, looking into the man's eyes.

"Very excellently well! by my faith, what a head sets upon your adorable shoulders, my Pauline. The only fault I find is that I am too well guarded. How long, my dear, must this comedy last, eh?"

"Until the matter of the wills is settled," returned the girl promptly. "The whole thing will become a perfect farce with the laugh on the other side, unless we can bring the old lady, my great-

aunt, to the point of recognizing that you can't inherit, as it now probably stands. Dear me, Louis! it strikes me that it is your turn now; I have installed you here as king of France; I am weary of posing; suppose I hand over the reins to you and let you manage the affair now to its issue."

Miss Ackerman's tone was entirely one of business; in fact her two months of apprenticeship at the direction of such an undertaking as this had proved, distinctly palled upon her. Like most of her race, her enthusiasm was boundless, her staying power small; and besides, she began to question her own love for de Monplaisir as well as his for her.

This gentleman was about to answer Pauline's last remark when the marquise, no longer to be restrained even by Mrs. Ackerman's wiles, came

through the low window of the boudoir, out to them on the terrace.

"Madame!" the king sprang to his feet and placed a chair for the marquise. "But I insist," he cried, as the old *grande dame* shook her head.

"I implore—well then, madame, since you force me, I command!" and then only did the marquise consent to sit in the presence of her sovereign.

"If your majesty will permit," she said, "I should wish to have mademoiselle withdraw for a time. I desire very much a private audience with your majesty on matters of moment. Your majesty shall impart it all to my beloved grandniece later." She smiles at Pauline, who, at a slight motion from de Monplaisir, rises, kisses the marquise's hand and goes into the house.

"Your majesty," said the marquise, drawing two documents with red seals from her reticule, and laying her cane down on the table, "this is my will, this is the will of my sister. Read them. Yes, I beg of you," as the king waved his hand deprecatingly, and then took the papers from the marquise.

"It is proper for your majesty to be master of their contents. This very morning after matins, which I regretted to learn your majesty was prevented from attending by a slight indisposition—" the king bowed with a sorrowful expression. "After matins, our good abbé counselled me, and wished me to no longer delay in acquainting your majesty officially with the facts. I am not young."

"Madame!" exclaimed de Monplaisir, in that tone of surprised remon-

strance which all Frenchmen assume when a woman, of no matter what age, addresses this remark to them.

"No, your majesty, and as the abbé observed, there is no reason why I should not, before I take my leave of France, of the world, have the great satisfaction of imparting to your majesty the fact that your majesty is the sole heir of my sister and myself."

Just as if he knew nothing whatever of this thing, Louis de Monplaisir sprang from his seat.

"Mon dieu! Madame! Impossible! Incredible!"

"Ah, I knew that my grandniece, loyal young soul, had not told you!"

"Ah, madame, it is of other matters that my adorable Pauline has written and spoken, I assure you."

"Read, read, now at once. I re-

quest it of your majesty as a favor."

With a shrug, as if fortunes were things not entering into royal calculations; with the smile and air of one deferring to the whim of age, the duke appeared only cursorily to examine the two brief papers. In reality, his keen fine eyes, his subtle intuitive intellect, grasped and took in the gist of the text in five seconds, when he airily handed them back to the marquise.

"Madame, it is, I repeat, impossible. While the poor scion of the house to which I belong reveres, honors and appreciates the splendid generosity and loyalty of both madame la marquise and mademoiselle, he could never, madame, accept such princely munificence. No! No!" With an almost royal motion, de Monplaisir rose, took a turn up the terrace and down again. "Madame, with

my whole heart I thank and bless you, but I must refuse."

The old marquise shook her head with twinkling eyes. "Your majesty, these," holding up the wills, "are unalterable."

"Madame," the king extended his hand, "permit me?" He took the documents from the marquise, and running his eye over them, smiled.

"Aha! I thought, although my first glance was hasty, that I was correct. You see!" the king pointed to certain lines on the parchments. "Madame, fate is on my side. These vast estates of yours, madame, are left to 'his majesty of de Bourbon d' Orléans, Louis The 19th, king of France.' Ah, madame, France recognizes no king! the house of Bourbon d' Orléans has less hold than any other that has reigned! there is in-

deed no Louis The 19th whatever. I am known in law, madame, and to my most intimate fr—followers," instantly corrected the king, "simply as 'Louis Duke de Monplaisir'—So, madame, you perceive that I can never become your heir, eh? Let us at once banish the subject, madame." His majesty took another little promenade of emotion, returning to give a seemingly casual glance at the marquise.

"Your majesty shall become our heir. I do not sleep tonight, mademoiselle my sister, shall not sleep tonight until Maître Ton-Ton is summoned from Aurillac, makes new wills under the direction of Monsieur l'Abbé, and they are signed and placed in the iron box in my apartment to remain until—the good God calls, and finds me listening."

And notwithstanding the entreaties,

the prayers, the commands even, of his majesty, the two new wills were duly drawn up, sealed, signed, and put away, leaving to "Louis, Duke de Monplaisir," one of the noblest and richest fortunes in France.

The last month of the summer now drew near its close. The twenty-fifth day, the fête of the blessed St. Louis was at hand, and if it was celebrated always with pomp and circumstance by the good people of the three little villages, it was decided that the ceremonies this year, when his majesty was indeed in their midst, should eclipse anything seen or heard of at Brimont for the last two centuries.

Masses were celebrated both in the chapel of the château and in the churches of Ste. Marie Madeleine at

Taube-sur-Mèr; St. Eustache at Brimont Taube; St. Basile at Brimont-Aujillac, beginning at six o'clock in the morning, the last one being sung by the venerable Abbé de la Toinette; and all of these were devoutly attended by his majesty and his suite, fasting. When, finally, de Monplaisir contrived to get a word with Miss Ackerman, as they came out from the concluding service, he said under his breath:

"Chèrie, by my faith, to be a king is hungry work! Mon dieu, I have at least expiated all my sins this morning! I have never been to so much church before in my life."

"Hush!" returned the young girl; "you will be heard. Well, it is all over now and the rest of the day one has nothing to do but to amuse one's self. Louis," she added, as they paced the

length of the formal flower garden, side by side, the suite following, also the marquise, mademoiselle, Mrs. Ackerman and the little chevalier, "we have succeeded, eh?"

"Decidedly," returned the duke, "now nothing remains but for the marquise to quit and leave us to enjoy your rightful inheritance."

It was high noon. There were birds singing in the thick close-cut boughs of the box-trees; there were flowers nodding out their perfumed breath all about; the aromatic scent of the purpling grapes came up from the vineyards; the songs of the peasants echoed in their ears, as the procession of St. Louis, carrying the Saint's Relic up the king's highway, could be seen moving joyfully along with its banners and music, candles, children with garlands,

and solemn priests. The splendor of the sunshine was over all the land, the sea, and the air.

"Louis," whispered the American girl to her suitor, "are you happy?"

"My well beloved!" exclaimed the young man, while his eyes sought hers in reproach, "I am at your side; I have no other answer. Is my Pauline happy, eh?" he asked tenderly.

"What a question!" she laughed merrily. "Should not the fiancée of a Bourbon be the happiest person in the world? Ask my grandaunt!"

They were to separate at the entrance of the château. Miss Ackerman was still laughing when she left the duke, but there was a strangely sorrowful shadow over the face of the late promoter's daughter.

The marquise had arranged for a

grand banquet and ball at the châteáu in the evening, and the whole of the remainder of the good St. Louis's day was entirely taken up with preparations for this entertainment, which was given more especially for the purpose of formally announcing the betrothal of the king to Mademoiselle Ackerman.

The Prince d'Oxillac had, without the least question, advanced the fact that no king or dauphin of France had ever before in the records of all history stooped to an alliance with one not of royal blood; but this uncontrovertible assertion had been met by his majesty with all that urbanity and esprit for which his house has ever been noted.

"My dear Prince," observed his majesty, "since the laws of France no longer recognize either my family, my throne, my claims, or my devotion to my

country; since I am not even permitted to take up arms for France, it should be no matter for surprise or question that I have sought and found a bride in that great country across the sea, which has more than once proved itself the asylum of my downfallen house. I do assure you, monsieur, that I do not overstep my royal prerogatives in the choice I have made. Should my throne ever revert to me, I am perfectly aware that the grandniece of Madame la Marquise will grace and honor it at my side."

The which speech met the hearty approval of all concerned, and caused the prince no end of joyful congratulations from his neighbors, at having been the recipient of so lengthy a favor from his majesty's own lips.

At eight o'clock the guests began to arrive, while the music, stationed in the

pavillon de danse, and also in the grand gallery, sounded out its sweetest; thousands of candles burned in the candelabra, lacqueys in their gold-laced uniforms ran hither and thither, and valets in blue and silver stood like sentinels in double rows on either side of the great staircase. Bunches of fleur-de-lys were in the tall vases; a carpet woven in the East spread all the way from the stairs to the entrance of the pavillon de danse, and further up the whole length of that splendid room with its walls of mirrors and cupids and garlands, to the very foot of the royal dais, whereon stood two superb chairs of oak, carved with the fleur-de-lys and canopied by the white flag with its golden lilies. In these same chairs had sat Louis The 13th and his queen a very long time ago.

Now all the great hall was lined with

the families of the comte, the prince, the baron, the chevaliers and messieurs of noble blood; now there was movement, color, sparkle; flash of gems and eyes; anticipation of youth and also of age; the music burst into a more glorious peal, the royal horn wound in its dominant note; there was a fanfare, and blare, and a beat of the drums, as his majesty Louis The 19th, in the gorgeous uniform of the Russian regiment of which he was indeed an officer, descended the stair.

Then there was homage, reverence, happiness, loyalty, written upon every face, as, slowly, bowing slightly to the right and left, with smiles, the king proceeded up the hall into the crowded ballroom to the dais, and, finding there the marquise with her grandniece, he received the young girl, returned her pro-

found courtesy, took her hand, and pressing his lips upon it, while Monsieur l'Abbé lifted his clasped hands above them, raised Pauline to a seat beside him upon the chair of Louis The 13th, and the grand roof up yonder in the shadows, reverberated with the shouts of his subjects.

Presently, when all had been presented, the ball was opened, as was etiquette, by the king leading forth his hostess, in the royal quadrille, while the prince was the partner of Pauline, the comte of mademoiselle, and the baron of the princess.

It was a royal, a beautiful sight, precisely as it might have been two hundred years ago, for all these honest, loyal gentlemen and their sons wore court dresses or uniforms; all these ladies sparkled with jewels, rouge, patches,

powdered hair and brocades stiff as staffs; and pattered and minced up and down on red and blue and gilded heels, so high that they frequently were in danger of falling over on their noses.

The young girls indeed were not poudrée. Pauline in a white frock, with a rope of pearls about her throat, had never looked lovelier in her life. Even now that was precisely what de Monplaisir whispered in her ear, as the formalities being accomplished, his majesty found himself at liberty to dance a very unaccustomedly (to him) stately tempo di valsia with his fiancée.

Well, with a sigh, light as a bit of down blown by the wind, Miss Ackerman brushed aside everything "just for a little while," she explained hurriedly to herself, and abandoned her whole heart and brain to the spell of the cir-

cumstances and the music—with that refrain which the maddest music still possessed as of the echo of loss—so sweet that it was well nigh bitter—abandoned herself to the lights, the homage, the success, the encircling arm of the lover— Yes, yes, this must be bliss, the pinnacle of happiness, the best that life could give, and her eyes met his in all the rapture of youth and fulfillment.

And yonder in that alcove where cupids are painted on the wall sat mademoiselle and the little chevalier.

He had also complimented his fiancée on her beautiful appearance, and had added, "Then, Marie Sylvie, I have your promise, also the consent of the marquise, your sister, that we shall be married on St. Leo's day, the tenth of September?"

"Since the king has come," assented mademoiselle with the most beautiful little pink blush imaginable flying up way beyond the round spots of rouge which Clémentine had put on her cheeks.

"Yes," cried the little chevalier, as he might since the music was quite deafening, "thank God! the king has come!"

Which, as it happened, were precisely the words which at that very moment, fell from the lips of the marquise herself. She had been into the banqueting hall and seen that everything was as it should be; the royal table set with the service and vases of matchless fayence d'Orion, the golden platters and fruit-dishes; the wines and sherbets; the meats and patés, and salads, and cakes, and confectionery; the grand *piéce monté* being a portrait in sugars of the

blessed St. Louis himself, swimming, as it were, in a sea of candied fleur-de-lys. And so, assured that all was going well, the old marquise had gone up to her little room in the tower and knelt down at the prie-dieu by the window, where the soft breeze of the August night blew the candle-flames in in streaks of smoke, and thanked God from her heart for His mercy and goodness, His condescension and graciousness in so honoring her house, in so permitting her aged eyes to look upon the face of His Anointed before they should close forever.

As she said "I thank thee, oh God, that my king has come, Amen," and crossed herself, even before she had risen from her knees, or even taken up her cane from the floor, the sharp ears of the marquise were attracted by the sound of footsteps beneath, coming

from the little stone balcony under the window; footsteps that she knew very well—Pauline's.

[VI]

VI

WHILE the marquise had been inspecting the banqueting hall, her grandniece and the *soi-disant* last of the Bourbons had been out on the little balcony beneath the marquise's window. De Monplaisir, slightly weary of the irks of royalty, wanted his fiancée to himself.

Miss Ackerman came with him reluctantly. Someway his grace failed to appeal to her tonight with his usual success; someway the face of the strong man who had helped her with her bicycle struck in between her and the handsome Napoleonic countenance of the son of the chanteuse excentrique. To be entirely frank, the adorations of her lover

bored her. As they sat there together, the duke's arm about her, his hand holding hers while she listened to him, she also heard—probably he did too!—the thanksgiving of the old marquise. Assuredly they both heard distinctly these words cutting in between the lover's enthusiasms—from the lips of the marquise: "I thank thee, oh God, that my king has come!"

De Monplaisir laughed, Pauline smiled, a sick fatuous smile. She drew her hands away from his; she drew herself out of his arm's fold.

"Suppose," the girl said, rising from the stone seat, "suppose now, Louis, that the old marquise lives on for a dozen years or so, what then, my friend?"

"God forbid!" piously ejaculated the king, "for I could not keep up, even one

seven days longer, this piece of deception—"

His fiancée's color rose, and her heart beat high as he spoke and her beautiful eyes blazed with the strangest, finest fire ever seen in mortal eyes, as she looked up at him in expectant superb admiration.

"—Not for all the millions at stake! this playing the role of the Bourbon!" The Napoleonic scion's tone is scornful.

"Is it so, oh, is it so?" Pauline flung herself back into his arms; she buried her head on his shoulder; she clung to him with a peculiar frantic joy. She shut her eyes tightly, thereby trying to shut out forever the memory of the strong man's face. She wept large, splendid tears of exultation. It seemed to her that from an abyss she had sprung to a heavenly height.

For, from the moment when her ears had caught the sound of the old marquise mumbling her thanksgivings to God for the spurious king, Pauline had revolted. It may be said that a young woman who could plot and plan and carry into effect the scheme that this one had, could never be troubled with compunctions; but fortunately those who would say this are not quite familiar with all sorts of women, more especially are they unacquainted with a certain modern type that belongs essentially in America. Those of this type are creatures of impulse truly, of changes, surprises, moods so tense and so varying as to render them incomprehensible to many. Daring creatures, unafraid to follow any lead; who say "why not!" to any suggestion, and yet heed the

whisper that she who is less unconventional smothers without concern.

"Indeed it is so, my beloved Pauline," replied the enraptured duke, pressing her to his heart. "I require to be myself once more, Louis de Monplaisir."

Pauline kissed his cheek, he was a whole man after all, he will adore her the more for what she is about to do.

"My beautiful one!" cried the young man in ecstasy. Pauline had never voluntarily kissed him before.

"How soon do you think it will be now that we can get away from here?" he added anxiously.

"At once, tomorrow," was the answer. "Louis, Louis, Louis!" the young girl slipped off the stone seat, down on the stone platform on her knees, her head on her lover's knees, her arms up

about him. "You feel as I do! I am sure you do. It is incomprehensible, it is queer; but the scales are off my eyes, they are off of yours, my well beloved, is it not so?" she inquired feverishly.

"Ah, my dear," replied the son of Napoleon Third, a trifle lamely, for he was thoroughly mystified, also scented an inexplicable danger, and was, therefore, cautious, in adding, "I don't quite know."

"Yes you do; then, I do! I do! Why!" she stood up straight now before him. "We were going to be robbers, you and I! villains, criminals, thieves; but we're not! we're not! we're not any more."

She laughed almost deliriously it seemed to the duke, who stared at her, and really felt as if the stone platform itself were slipping from under his feet.

"Are we?" asked Pauline piercingly.

"What do you mean, dearest?" asked the duke.

"I mean," she said breathlessly, "just what you must mean, too, that I will not touch a sou of the fortune of these two old women; no, no, never."

De Monplaisir possessed the inscrutable, slow and beautifully lidded eyes of his father; he regarded the young creature near him with outward calmness. He was occupied in balancing her against the last wills and testaments of the marquise and mademoiselle, in adjusting the quality of his reply.

He put out his arms and smiled.

"Ah, my child," he whispered tenderly, "you are unstrung, your nerves are cracking with this excitement, you are ill, my Pauline, you don't know what you are saying. We have toiled together, we must enjoy together this

vast fortune which is yours by right, my dearest—" The duke's tone was fascinatingly sweet and persuasive.

Miss Ackerman sprang from him, she had time enough to think that she might regret it in bitterness and poverty, but she remembered her father in a vague, crude fashion, and she remembered the man on the road.

"I am not ill," she cried, "I am more well and sane than ever I was. I am going to tell the marquise now that you are not the king! not a Bourbon even, and that I am a liar and a cheat!"

He knew now that she meant it, and seized her in a grip of steel.

"No, by heaven! you are not," whispered the brigand's grandson. "You'll do as I say, and not move from here until you promise to hold your tongue."

Miss Ackerman looked up at her lover

as she felt the grip of his handsome hands on hers.

"My beloved!" was the duke's reply to this look, "your absurdity forces me. Now, now, when we have everything in our grasp you would dash all my hopes to air—the fortune is yours. Come, come, my Pauline." He kissed her captive hands; he was trembling from head to foot.

Then the stone platform seemed to crumble beneath her feet; then indeed she felt herself a rudderless bark beaten by the wind, and that henceforth the battle must be bitterer than even in the old days.

Her lover was a cad and a cur; to be sure, what other sort would have played the part he had?

And she herself? A cad and a cur too. Miss Ackerman had no reserve

even of pity for herself, but God knows! her father, maybe, was standing up there for her, near her—that night in France.

"You will be silent, Pauline, and not foolish or stupid, eh? For the sake of your own Louis, your mamma and our future?"

Miss Ackerman's reply was to break loose from the grasp of the Duke de Monplaisir, to be caught by him again immediately however.

"Imbecile!" he whispered hoarsely in her ear. "Do you think I have come down here away from my Paris, been bored to death by these old women, masqueraded as a Bourbon, one of the race I hate!—to be foiled, duped and disappointed by you now? No! I tell you no!"

"Yes," answered his prisoner, "yes! you have."

"Do you not love me, then?" he asked softly, as he saw the millions slipping away.

Miss Ackerman laughed, but spoke no word.

"Bah! Canaille! Bourgeoise! Ingrate! I was indeed, I!—a Buonaparte! —a fool most damned to condescend to an alliance with a miserable American, without dot, without connection, without a cent."

He flung her from him, "Go away with you," he cried, "but take with you on your despicable errand the knowledge that you will break the heart of your mamma, and—that the old marquise likes me too well to believe you."

The Duke de Monplaisir, the son of an emperor, sat down; Miss Ackerman,

breathing hard from the fling she had got, walked away; she did not think anything except the sorrow of it all, and she went upstairs and met the marquise on the landing, and while the music played very sweetly afar off for the ball, the younger woman led the old one back into her room and stood up in front of her and told her all without shirk, excuse, or concealment.

The marquise heard her grandniece through without the quiver of so much as an eyelash, or a movement of the small bird-like fingers, or of the little high-shod feet.

All that went on in her mind was the refrain over and over again:

"My king has not then come, my king has not then come; and death is coming, and I shall go with death before the king can come."

The old receive large facts with intelligence; complexity bewilders them.

Pauline had finished and even turned away. She had not the least idea of receiving or asking for forgiveness; she had forgotten herself for once, and the only person now whom she recalled was the man who had helped her on the road. One can't help one's thoughts or one's memories!

As Miss Ackerman turned to go, the marquise said, "Go away out of my sight." She thus reiterated the duke's words.

"Yes," answered the niece, "I am going."

Then the marquise picked up her cane, rose with some difficulty it is true, pulled the bell-rope, tottered back again to her large chair and sank into it, her heart beating to burst the tight lacings

of her magnificent bodice of pink brocade.

"Clémentine," she said in a strange harsh voice, when the waiting-woman came, "here is the key, open the iron box, so; hand me the two parchments on top, those with the seals. Yes, now hand me the others that are beneath, so." The old woman took them in her trembling fingers, and held them tightly. "Seek Monsieur l'Abbé at once, very quietly; request him politely to come to me here. Be quick, for the love of God!"

Clémentine rushed from the room. She was frightened. She returned almost at once with the abbé.

"My daughter, you are ill!" exclaimed the confessor. "Let us pray."

"Monsieur, stop! before you bring religion to me, tell me, these are the old

wills of my sister and myself, eh? and these are the new, for the love of God, be quick!"

"Yes, madame, you are correct." The old man examined and separated the papers carefully.

"Put the old ones back, Clémentine, in the iron box, and bring the lights nearer, it is growing dark! So, so!" The marquise held the two documents up in the flame of the candles; she watched them ignite, curl, wither, crisp and blow away out the window in a powdery shower down on the very head of her grandniece.

"Hold!" she said, with a flickering smile, then a little gurgling laugh. "It is done."

"But the king, madame, the inheritance?" cried the abbé in dismay.

"Hark, monsieur, you were right, I am ill! Clémentine, cut the lacing of my bodice, it does not matter; I shall not want to wear it again. Now, Monsieur, bring in religion; Clémentine, call mademoiselle, no one else! The king, you said, monsieur? Well, I tell you, there is no king come yet to Brimont, not yet! Bring religion now, and for the love of God, be quick!"

Presently the abbé was administering the last rites; presently mademoiselle knelt weeping at the side of her sister; presently, while still the music sounded out its sweetest and most beautiful measures, the old marquise raised herself in her chair and rapped with her cane on the floor, and dragged herself over to the window, and pulled aside the fluttering curtains.

"Behold!" she cried in a voice that startled them all, while the bloom of the moonrise glorified her pinched features, while the salt of the sea smote her in the face.

"A sail! a sail! the white standard with the lilies, flying at the mast! Grandmama said he would come by the sea, that we must watch ever and not be weary! Look, look! messieurs and mesdames—the royal ship has seen our lights and salutes—them— Bid them make ready—at Aurillac, at Taube—everywhere — for — the — coming — of — our king!"

And the marquise fell back stark dead, with a smile on her face, which so transfigured it that even in her youth she had not been so beautiful, and the others looking out did see the silhouette of a vessel against the sky, but it faded

away down below the horizon and never made that port.

The young pupil of Madame Reeb had also seen that maybe phantom sail far off shimmering in the fog of the beautiful coast-lying lands; she had started as the ashes of the burnt wills alighted on her bare shoulders and had brushed them off; then she sat down on the stone seat where so little a while ago she had been with de Monplaisir. The music was crashing its loudest as it broke from a waltz into the air that greets the appearance of a Bourbon king—de Monplaisir had reëntered the ball-room just at that moment, seeking Mrs. Ackerman, and about to make a last stand for the millions, his adventurous brain in a whirl, and his keen wits thick with a new plot whereby he could pronounce the daughter (with the mother's conniv-

nce—) insane and thus retain his sition and his hold upon the marquise d her fortune.

He believed he could count on Mrs. Ackerman for almost any thing and he is correct; had other circumstances t been equal, the son of the emperor ..d the chanteuse excentrique had been undoubtedly able to carry out his ideas.

But—what will you! in this world—things are most unaccountably uncertain; as the orchestra struck up its air to Louis The Nineteenth, as all these amiable and elegant ladies and gentlemen were rejoicing in their monarch's return from his half-hour absence from the scene of the festivities, some one, the little chevalier it was afterward said, entered among them and whispered a tremulous word or two, which went around, and the music stopped with a

strange unfinished cadence vibrating on the air, and a hush that was sharp in its suddenness fell upon every soul in the place.

Miss Ackerman without, noted the curious lull, the wind even was still, only the break of the sea on the sands went on, only her own agile facile brain worked relentlessly, telling her of the very lip of the volcano on which she had smilingly stood, and lashing her for the horror and consummate and vulgar success of her project. But she had resigned it; she had abandoned it; she had,—with the one leavening drop of her land-promoter father's honest blood in her veins, and with the unconfessed memory of the face of the man on the road in her brain,—she had laid down all her contemptible weapons, and had conquered!

Pauline was laughing tremulously out there by herself when a sob that seemed to come concertedly from all the people indoors broke upon her moment of lonely triumph.

The Duke de Monplaisir, not having heard the fact, as he had immediately left the ball-room in search of Mrs. Ackerman, now appeared from the terrace; at the same moment Pauline's mother rushed out to her daughter, claret-cup in hand, shaking with agitation.

His grace and the American widow thus met almost in each other's arms.

Mrs. Ackerman with a terrified gasp said under her breath as she stared into Louis de Monplaisir's eyes, "You know it?"

"But, yes, madame, I certainly know it," is his reply.

"And you?" the woman says brusquely, turning more toward her daughter.

"Most undoubtedly," answered the girl, "since I have just myself told the duke." Pauline wondered how her parent was going to take it.

"Told him what?" inquired the mother in a bewildered fashion.

"That I will not marry him, that I will not touch a penny of the marquise's money."

"Madame! madame!" the voice of the son of Napoleon Third was soothing, indulgent, "our poor little Pauline is not herself—crazed, temporary insanity," he whispered aside to the mother. "We must at once, rather I, will seek the marquise and explain to her that Pauline's words are madness, and you, madame, you summon every physician in

the three towns; my beloved Pauline shall be cured!"

Pauline really looked at him, or rather she looked him over and was turning on her heel with a smile of simple derision when a piercing shriek from her mother caused both of the young persons to start.

"But the marquise is dead!" Mrs. Ackerman said.

The young girl fell upon her knees. She thanked God that she had done what she had before this hour.

The young man, supple as a snake, thanked God also in his heart and aloud he said:

"Ah, now this is one of the fortunate affairs in life. Since the amiable marquise had to die, it was most intelligent and beneficent of the good God to remove her at this unhappy crisis in my

Pauline's mind—eh, Madame Ackerman? the wills are safely signed, sealed, recorded."

"Heaven be praised!" ejaculated the promoter's widow piously.

"Yes, heaven be praised!" echoed the girl, but with a smile as she picked up from the stone floor some charred and mutilated scraps of paper.

"Look," she added in a quiet voice as she held these bits up in the light before the eager eyes of her respected mamma and her quondam fiancé.

There was quite sufficient on the pieces of paper for each of these excellent personages to perceive at once that they were indeed the remains of the wills made in favor of the "Duke de Monplaisir" by the marquise and mademoiselle.

"Sacrée—é—é—" muttered the Napoleonic scion under his breath as he gazed at that which his ex-fiancée held aloft.

Mrs. Ackerman's eyes narrowed to the width of a mere slit of cunning vengeful light.

"How did it happen?" she asked in a raw, hoarse voice, taking hold of her young daughter's slim arm, and as the sobs came more loudly from within.

"I told the marquise all," was the answer.

"When?" pursued the other woman, her lips thinning to match the two slit-like organs of her vision; and still the sobs and confusion grew louder and more dense from inside the château.

"Fifteen minutes ago," was the reply.

"How dared you?" the mother hissed relentlessly.

"Oh, I'm glad! glad!" cried the girl, "that I did it before it was too late."

"I wish to heaven you had gone to heaven, or wherever the place is, with your precious father. You are just like him."

The duke was taking a turn up the terrace and endeavoring to mentally manipulate the embarrassing situation somewhat to his own advantage.

Had his adored Pauline been but more like her mamma! A very fine woman, too, not so old, accomplished, full of ideas—tiens! Well, who knows? two such heads as his own and the promoter's widow's might yet work wonders in some of the capitals of Europe. His grace smiled to himself.

At this moment Pauline Ackerman regarded her companion with rather gloomy eyes. She heard the mourning indoors, the sea moaning yonder; she slipped down on her knees beside the mother that bore her, and the mother said, still in that raw, relentless tone:

"What, pray, do you propose to do, Miss?"

"To work," responded Pauline.

"Work! with the past here to look back upon! You are a fool!"

"Look here, mother, don't talk about the past; it is done with. I can't explain why the change came over me, but I am changed. There's something that I've got, and you'll have it with me, so don't worry or cry any more."

"What have you got?" exclaimed Mrs. Ackerman avariciously, and drying her eyes. "Did the old woman ever

give you any cash sum? how much? speak, what is it?"

"It's the future," the girl answered, rising and straightening herself up proudly, quite unheeding the now frantic outburst of her parent.

Mrs. Ackerman took hold of Pauline and shook her roughly.

"That for your future, and your work!" she cried fiercely. "You've given away your inheritance just as I might have expected the child of your idiotic quixotic father to have done. I ought to have watched you until all danger of such nonsense coming into your head was at an end. And now to add to the rest, do you mean to tell me that you have jilted the duke? eh? answer me."

Pauline laughed; it was a bitterly hard laugh, yet the angels of the Lord

might well rejoice over its mirthless ring.

"Yes," she said shortly, "I suppose I have."

"I thought," sneered the mother, "that you loved him!"

"So did I," was the quick retort.

"See here, Pauline," whispered the older woman, "for God's sake listen to reason; don't break with de Monplaisir; he is—someone! With a title, your beauty and his influence, there are always Monte Carlo, Homberg, Aix and Nice, not to mention Paris and all the houses of the empire nobility open to him, and all of them great on gambling."

Miss Ackerman now regarded her mother with a fine curious stare; she saw the guests filing out to the porte cochére to get into their carriages; she

saw the duke's handsome profile outlined against the brilliant lights of the chandelier. She saw him approaching; between her and him, she also beheld mistily the face of the man on the road.

"I have broken with the duke, mother, and nothing earthly would make me take him back; moreover, to be just, he is quite as willing as I to be free."

"Where are you going to?" snapped the parent.

"Paris," was the answer.

"Paris! You! alone, for I'll not go with you! With your face and attractions, your poverty and your tastes, do you know what it will mean?" sneered the older lady.

"Yes, it will mean hard work."

"Bah! it will mean shame, degradation, the streets!"

Pauline Ackerman turned like a flash.

"You hush!" she whispered tensely, "and never after tonight do you call me daughter or cross my path—and you might have helped me—" it was the wail of a spirit that sorrows but is strong. "I am going away from here as soon as it is daylight; good-by."

She passed quickly; she met de Monplaisir face to face; he had quite made up his mind and was absolutely returning to confirm his decisions.

He regarded Pauline with a perfect composure; persons of noble blood are supposed to be almost always impassive.

Pauline's eyes fell.

Mrs. Ackerman, hoping against hope, was watching the encounter. When she saw that it came to nothing, she wept vigorously and said:

"You see, Louis, my unnatural child defies me, spurns you, and has bade me farewell forever. Ah, my dear duke, a mother—"

Something in his grace's attitude and expression stopped Mrs. Ackerman short.

He approached her with a subdued and unmistakable air.

"Madame," said his grace, "I cannot say to you to permit me to be to you a son; madame is too young and too pretty a woman for that, but, madame, it is quite possible for me to exist without mademoiselle, and there is always—"

Pauline had heard so much, then she went on into the château to pack her clothes to leave at daybreak, and heard no more.

The future was indeed hers, tho the path lay through fire, tho the

recollection of king Louis The Nineteenth embittered it, and tho humiliation and sorrow sat down with her at her meagre meat, nevertheless that strength and sight which had come to her in the very zenith of transgression's success never forsook her.

She learned that singular secret of living which makes him who renounces to possess, and which teaches us that some of those whom we meet on the road as we go along are not chance travelers, but maybe the heaven-sent arbiters of our destiny.

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